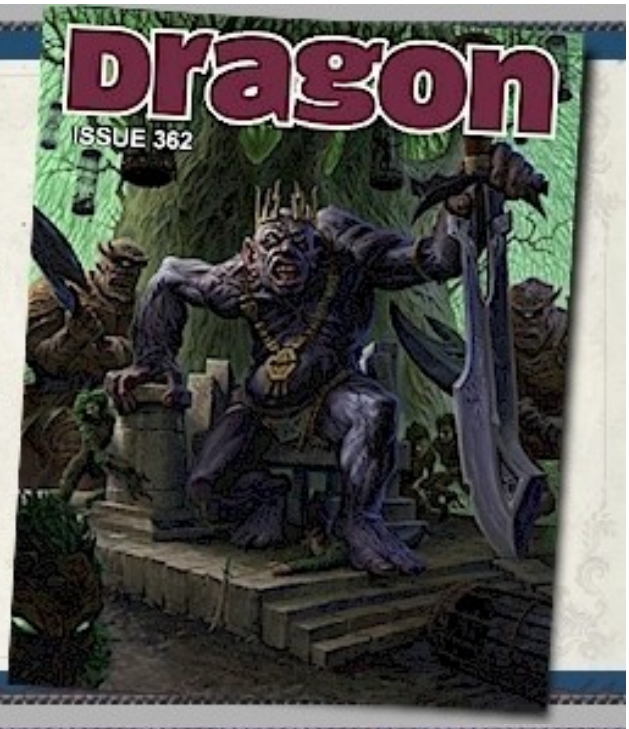
Dragon #362

We're less than five months away from the launch of 4th Edition. This issue continues to feature exclusive glimpses of 4th Edition, and more articles that will prepare you for the new game. In addition, we've started our Countdown to the Realms of 4th Edition, and more articles detailing what the Forgotten Realms will look like in a few months.



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Bill's generosity knows no bounds ... or maybe this is just because of that pesky pact he signed with Asmodeus. Oh well, as long we get to reap the rewards. Ladies and gentlemen, meet the pit fiend.
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Confessions of a Full-Time Wizard
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Design & Development
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by Chris Youngs

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Magic Item Slots (Page 53)

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Design & Development

Magic items are almost as much a part of D&D as dungeons and dragons. Get a look at the magic item slots in 4th Edition, and some of the design insight behind the changes to the system.

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Fearless (Page 55)

Dragon Editorial

I've always been something of a risk taker with my **D&D** characters. I'd volunteer to be the guy who opened the door or the chest, even though I was nearly certain to pay the consequences. Sometimes, said consequences took unexpected turns....

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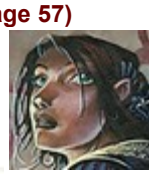
RPGA Report

From its humble beginnings in the late '80s as an alternative play experience to the tournament-style convention play the **RPGA** was offering, **Living City** grew to become the most popular program the **RPGA** had yet seen.

by Chris Tulach



Countdown to the Realms

Year of the Ageless One

by Rich Baker
01/11/2008

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The Realms of 1479 DR

Ninety-four years ago, Mystra perished and the world went mad.

Unchecked, ungoverned, the raw stuff of wild magic danced across the world, wreaking terrible destruction. Cities burned, kingdoms fell, luckless people were changed into monsters, and mages went berserk. This was the Spellplague, a rippling outbreak of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of magical catastrophes that left no corner of Faerûn untouched. For almost ten years new outbreaks appeared here and there, striking randomly and without warning. Wherever they struck, chaos reigned.

During the Year of Blue Fire and the terrible years that followed, heroes all over Faerûn battled to contain the magical plague. In some places they succeeded; in others, they failed and died horribly. Places guarded by powerful, persistent magical wards were largely unharmed; the Spellplague flowed around mythals and other such mighty enchantments. But even then, some mythal-guarded sites fell prey to invasions of plaguechanged monsters or the spells of maddened archmages. No place was truly safe.

In many places, the Spellplague wrought drastic changes to the very shape of the world. The vast Underdark system beneath the western Shaar suffered a calamitous collapse, leaving a miles-deep pit the size of a country where the Landrise once ran. Thay's forbidding plateaus were lifted thousands of feet higher, leaving many of its cities in ruins. The Priador and eastern Thesk are a maze of monster-haunted foothills beneath Thay's daunting ramparts now. Fencelike ridges of glass spires, drifting earthmotes covered in weird aerial forests, towering mesas of whorled stone - all over Faerûn magical landscapes are interspersed with the common rock and root of the lands that existed before. Even in countries that survived the Spellplague more or less intact, these "changelands" stand as striking new landmarks...landmarks that sometimes harbor monsters never before seen in Faerûn.

In time, the fury of the Spellplague burned itself out. New outbreaks became fewer and weaker, and finally seemed to cease altogether. Pockets of "live" Spellplague still exist in a few places known as plaguelands; one of the largest is a vast waste known as the Changing Lands, where Sespech and Chondath used to be. Few people dare to enter such places, but from time to time they disgorge horribly mutated monsters, tormenting the lands nearby. No new plaguelands have appeared in decades now, and some seem to be weakening as the years pass. But the damage has already been done.

No one will ever be able to create a comprehensive chronology of where and when each outbreak struck, or how each town and city fared through the chaos of the Plague Years. Countless thousands of people fled from each new outbreak, migrating here and there across the continent. War, rebellion, and brigandage reigned unchecked. Mad prophets walked the world, preaching that the Spellplague was the wrath of this god or that and demanding repentance, sacrifice, or holy war in atonement. Anarchy descended over most kingdoms and lasted for a generation or more before some semblance of authority was re-established. The world that emerged from the Plague Years was not the same Faerûn.

The Sword Coast

The Spellplague left the cities of the Sword Coast almost unscathed. Perhaps it was attenuated by the lingering high magic of ancient Illefarn, perhaps it was deflected by the efforts of mighty heroes, or perhaps sheer chance steered the magical contagion away from the Sea of Swords; however it happened, the Sword Coast looks much as it did a hundred years ago.

In Waterdeep the great walking statues hidden within the city arose for a single day and wrecked several wards, only to suddenly halt where they stood when the Spellplague's influence retreated again. To this day the towering colossi remain standing where they were at that moment, while the city has been rebuilt around their stony waists. Waterdeep is still governed by its Lords, advised by the Blackstaff...the most powerful mage of Blackstaff Tower, heir to the lore of the mighty Khelben. The city remains a hub of trade and commerce; all roads lead to Waterdeep, or so it is said.

To the south, the city of Baldur's Gate became a refuge for countless thousands fleeing the ruin wrought by the Spellplague in the lands south of the Sea of Fallen Stars. Where other cities and lands turned away such refugees, Baldur's Gate tolerated them- and now, almost a century later, it is the largest city in Faerûn, sprawling for mile after mile along the banks of the Chionthar. Each group of refugees created their own neighborhood under the walls of the previous immigrants' districts, and the city is a mad patchwork of crowded neighborhoods, each dominated by a single race or human ethnicity such as dwarf, halfling, gnome, Turmic, or Shaaran.

Across the Sea of Swords, the Moonshaes have fallen into a patchwork of small kingdoms. Caer Calidyrr still stands as the chief kingdom of the native Moonshavians (the Ffolk), but over the last century the powerful mainland realm of Amn has set its sights on this land. Amnite merchant-lords control much of the large island of Gwynneth, while the warlike Northlanders hold Oman and Norland. The Feywild, the realm of Faerie, lies close to Faerûn here, and from its shadows a dire new threat is gathering...the terrible fomorians, who dream of sweeping away the human kingdoms and subjugating the islands beneath their mighty fists.

The Empire of Netheril

Between the North and the Moonsea Lands lies a land under the dominion of shadow. The reborn Empire of Netheril now lies in the basin that once held the desert Anauroch. The new Netheril claims all of the lands that ancient Netheril once occupied, and seeks to dominate Faerûn just as ancient Netheril did twenty centuries ago. Much of Anauroch's vast basin is still desolate wasteland, but the lords of Netheril have spent decades weaving mighty spells to summon water to the parched lands and fill the empty skies with rain. Slowly but surely, grassland grows over the dunes, and young forests cover the stony barrens.

Netheril is a magical tyranny, governed by a noble caste of shades...powerful human mages and lords who have exchanged their mortal essences for the stuff of shadow. Beneath the shade lords are the citizens of Shade, the ancient city-state that fled into the plane of Shadow when the old empire fell and survived many centuries in dark exile. They are a race of ambitious and masterful humans who strive to advance the power of their realm, hoping to earn the reward of transformation into undying shades themselves. When folk of other lands refer to "the Netherese," they mean the people of Shade, both human and shadow-transformed.

Decades ago, the Netherese subjugated the nomads of Anauroch and many of the savage humanoid tribes inhabiting the desert. More importantly, the Netherese seized control of the wealthy nation of Sembia in the Twilight War just before the advent of the Spellplague, and they have not relinquished it since. Sembia is the crown jewel of the Empire of Netheril, and provides the Netherese with the wealth and manpower they need to bring more of Faerûn under their control. Only the fragile alliance of Myth Drannor, Cormyr, Evereska, and Luruar checks Netheril's further expansion - and Netherese diplomats and agents work constantly to break the alliance apart.

While Netheril claims all of Anauroch and the neighboring lands, the Netherese are still few in number, and great portions of this desolate land are left to ruins and monsters. The ruined cities of old Netheril and the Underdark caverns of the monstrous phaerimm (now all but extirpated from the Realms) hold many secrets the shades want to remain hidden, and ancient treasures they seek desperately to recover.

Imperial Cormyr

Cormyr is a strong, stable kingdom that has benefited from back-to-back reigns by very capable monarchs. Azoun V, born in the troubling times at the end of his grandfather's reign, went on to become a just, wise, and long-lived ruler. Under his rule Cormyr quickly recovered from the chaos of the Plague Years. Azoun V successfully resisted Netheril's efforts to bring Cormyr under its domionion, and he fought Netherese-sponsored Sembia to a stalemate in a war 40 years ago, preserving Cormyr from Sembia's fate. Late in his reign, Azoun V enacted a new code of laws that restrained the power of Cormyr's restless nobility and established rights for commoners oppressed by nobles. His son Foril is now king of Cormyr.

Foril has ruled for 30 years now, and while he is not the legendary warrior his great-grandfather was or the brilliant law-giver his father was, he is a shrewd statesman and administrator. Foril continued his father's reforms, and authored the alliance of powers that keeps Netheril at bay. Standing between Sembia and Netheril, Cormyr's best security lies in firm alliance with Myth Drannor and the Dalelands. Cormyr is wealthier and more powerful than it's been in centuries, largely due to the foresight and determination of the Obarskyrs.

Cormyr now controls Daerlun and Urmlaspyr, two formerly Sembian cities that managed to break away from that realm before the Netherese yoke settled completely over them. During the chaos of the Spellplague and the years that followed, the small cities on the southern shore of the Dragonmere turned to Cormyr for protection. Only ten years ago, the thief-ruled city of Proskur proved so obnoxious to the Forest Kingdom's growing trade and prosperity that King Foril brought it under Cormyr's authority as well. Not all of these territories are content under Cormyrean rule.

Adventurers in the service of the Crown find plenty of excitement in the Stonelands, the Tunlands, and the Stormhorns, where various monsters and savage tribes (some secretly sponsored by Netheril) cause no small amount of trouble.

Tymanther, Land of the Dragon Warriors

Along the shore of the Alamber Sea, old Unther was swept away by a catastrophic outbreak of the Spellplague. Where once ancient Unther stood now stands an arid mesa-land inhabited by draconic humanoids calling themselves dragonborn. This is the realm of Tymanther. The dragonborn have proven to be a proud, martial race, and in the decades since the Year of Blue Fire they have slowly tamed the ruined changeland from the Riders to the Sky all the way to the Black Ash Plain.

Some say that the dragonborn are creations of Tiamat, hatched from vast incubators hidden beneath temples of the dragon-goddess in the cities of Unther. Others believe that the dragonborn are descended from the human population of the old empire, changed by the touch of the Spellplague into something no longer human. But the truth of the matter is even stranger: As it did in many other places in Faerûn, the Spellplague opened the door to some other realm entirely, wrenching the aeries and castles of the dragonborn from their native land...wherever that once was...and depositing them amid the chaos of devastated Unther.

The dragonborn of Tymanther are highly militarized, and the "lords" of the land are those dragonborn who have proven themselves capable of leading their fellows. It is a harsh and unforgiving meritocracy, and each of the kingdom's great clans is organized more like an army than a noble house. In the world from which they came, the dragonborn fought many terrible wars against true dragons, and they still harbor an ancestral hate for the winged wyrms.

Tymanther lies atop the rubble of ancient Unther, and Untheric ruins are common throughout the land. Even in its decline, Unther was a rich and populous land, and many palaces and treasure vaults of the God-King's favorites still wait to be discovered. In other places, broken cities carried into Faerûn from Tymanther's appearance are likewise storehouses of gold, gems, and magical artifacts. Unfortunately, many powerful monsters settled into these Untheric and Tymantheran ruins during the Plague Years, and still pose a deadly threat to those who delve too deeply.

The Changed World

This brief discussion touches on only a few of Faerûn's myriad kingdoms and peoples. It's a quick sketch of how a century has changed several familiar lands, and a look at one new land that has arisen during that time. Many of Faerûn's most iconic locales are still what they were a century ago; wood elves still roam the High Forest, and pirates still sail the Sea of Fallen Stars. Other places such as Unther have changed drastically, as described above. But above all Faerûn remains a land of high magic, terrifying monsters, ancient ruins, and hidden wonders...the essential fantasy world for your players to explore.

In upcoming previews, we'll take a more thorough look at other aspects of the new Faerûn...the fate of the Chosen, the nature of the pantheon, how magic has changed in the world, and an introduction to some of the new threats that now menace Faerûn. Good fortune and good adventuring until next time!

About the Author

A former officer in the US Navy, **Rich Baker** has been a game designer since 1991. He has written or contributed to more than 70 game products, including 3rd Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** and **Axis & Allies Miniatures**. He is also the author of eight *Forgotten Realms* novels, including the New York Times bestseller *Condemnation*.

Rich married his college sweetheart, Kim, in 1991; they have two daughters, Alex and Hannah. Rich's interests include Golden Age SF, military history, hiking in the Cascades, wargaming, and the Philadelphia Phillies.

Countdown to the Realms

Magic in the Forgotten Realms

by Bruce Cordell
01/30/2008

Dragon Features Archive
Dragon 362

Magical power and fantastic features abound in the **Forgotten Realms**. Arcane secrets whisper to those with the ears to hear in the eons-long movement of the continents, in rushing river rapids, in every inhalation of beasts great and small, and in the sighing cries of the wind. Raw magic is the wild stuff of creation itself, the mute and mindless will of being, suffusing every bit of matter and coursing within every manifestation of energy throughout the world.

Wizards, warlocks, clerics, sorcerers, bards, paladins, and even rogues, fighters, rangers, and other adventurers call upon personally derived threads of magic to cast mighty spells, enforce pacts with enigmatic entities, heal injury, ward against evil, or accomplish physical feats that transcend purely mortal means.

Dangerous monsters, too, call up frightful magic to accomplish their deceitful ends. Aberrations spawned by ancient magic seethe below the earth and above it, hungry for flesh and knowledge alike, waiting for the chance to feed. Dragons whose blood runs with magic wield abilities so potent that gods and primordials alike fear to face the most ancient of these mighty beings. Undead fuel their mind and protect their corpses from dissolution by powerful necromantic rituals, especially liches, whose never-ending acquisition of arcane knowledge has propelled more than a few into contention with divine designs.

Indeed, magic is so bountiful in Abeir-Toril that even the land bristles with fantastic landscapes. Great motes of free-hanging earth balance on nothing but air, amazing all those who chance upon these mighty demonstrations of nature's glory.

If fact, the **Realms** are so awash with magic that the world proved particularly vulnerable to a plague that fed on magic itself.

The Year of Blue Fire

"Learn ye well the lesson of the pebble that begets a landslide. Likewise a single betrayal unleashed the Spellplague, whose consequences yet dance and stagger across Toril, and beyond."
--Elminster of Shadowdale, 1479 DR, Year of the Ageless One

An appalling magical event called the Spellplague afflicted (and still afflicts) the world in 1385 DR.

Despite its name, the Spellplague was much more than a disease. For one, it did not restrict itself to mere flesh. All things were meat to the Spellplague's insatiable hunger ... flesh, stone, magic, space, and perhaps even the flow of time was suborned. The world of Toril, its lost sibling Abeir, and even the planes themselves were infected with a plague of change.

Most suppose the Spellplague was the direct result of the goddess of magic's murder at the hands of the god Cyric. Some whisper that Mystra's death was achieved through the machinations of the goddess Shar, with Cyric her unwitting stooge.

This theory holds that the world's magic was held so long in Mystra's Weave that when the Weave lost its weaver, magic spontaneously and ruinously burst its bonds. Areas of wild magic, already outside the constraints of the Weave, touched off first when their boundaries misted suddenly away. But eventually, few parts of Toril and the planes beyond were unaffected.

The plague raged on and on in ever-widening spirals, leaving some places completely untouched (such as many northern lands of Faerûn, including Cormyr and the Swordcoast), and radically altering others (such as Muhorand, Unther, and points south). The plague passed into the realms of demons, gods, and lost souls ... dividing some realms, joining others, and generally seeding chaos.

Near-mythical realms that had passed beyond easy reach were pulled back, such as the Feywild (called Faerie in ancient days). The home of demons fell through the cosmology, unleashing swarming evil before the Abyss found its new home beneath the Elemental Chaos.

Even the long forgotten world of Abeir burned in the plague of spells, despite having been unreachable and cut off from Faerûn for tens of millennia. Portions of Abeir's landscape were transposed with areas of Toril in the disaster. Such landscapes included their living populations, and thus places such as Akanûl and Tymanther lie as if new-birthed on Faerûn's face. Across the Trackless Sea, and entire continent of the lost realm reappeared (called Returned Abeir) subsuming the continent of Maztica.

The Spellplague was a potent direct agent of change, but it also set off a string of secondary catastrophes.

Effects on the Weave
For eons, the use of magic in Faerûn was focused through a god of magic, most recently Mystra. Except for certain Netherese wizards of ancient days who learned the truth, most believed that no magic would be possible without such a deity. However, with the death of Mystra and jealous Shar suppressing the ascension of a new deity of magic, it became common knowledge that magic is accessible without a god to control and codify it. Now when a spellcaster speaks of the Weave, she is just using another term for magic.

Effects on the Shadow Weave
Just as Mystra controlled the Weave, the goddess Shar controlled the Shadow Weave. Not satisfied with her portion, Shar plotted to seize control of both. She miscalculated. When Cyric murdered Mystra, the Weave collapsed so completely that Shar not only failed to gather up the fraying threads, she also lost control over the Shadow Weave.

Just as magic persists without Mystra, so does the dusky power of shadow endure without Shar acting as an intermediary. Powerful necromancers have developed their own unique methods for accessing the dim energies of the Shadowfell.

Effect on Spellcasters
Many creatures that learned to cast spells and channel magic with Mystra's Weave found themselves powerless in the Spellplague's wake. Some never regained their power. Others worked to attune themselves to the new magical environment. Many required years to regain this facility, while others never regained the knack. Others took shortcuts to re-aquire the power they'd lost, swearing questionable pacts to enigmatic beings in return for the ability to utilize arcane powers.

Today, spellcasters access magic through a dizzying array of methods. Some murmur spells and incant rituals, some forge arcane bargains, and others pray for intervention. In truth, it seems that magic can be accessed in more ways than ever before, fueled by new found knowledge of arcane, shadow, primal, and other sources of power.

Effect on Items
Most magic items that permanently store magic, such as magic swords, cloaks, and boots, survived the Spellplague and continue to operate normally. Permanent access to magic was "installed" in these devices when they were created, so even though the Weave was used in their making, the Weave no longer played any part in their continuing operation. That said, some items that temporarily stored "charges" of magic, such as wands and staffs created prior to the Spellplague, no longer work. If such items do work, they no longer work in the same way.

The secret of making magic items in a post-Weave world was relearned decades ago. Magic items are as plentiful as ever, as desperately sought by doughty adventurers, and as mysterious as they ever were.

Effects on the Landscape
Where magic was completely loosed, the Spellplague ate through stone and earth as readily as bone and spell. Broad portions of Faerûn's surface collapsed into the Underdark, partially draining the Sea of Fallen Stars into the Glimmer Sea far below (and leaving behind a continent-sized pit called the Underchasm). The event splintered several of the Old Empires south of the drained sea into a wildscape of towering mesas, bottomless ravines, and cloud-scraping spires (further erasing evidence of the lands and kingdoms once situated there). Historical lands most changed by the Spellplague include Mulhorand, Unther, Chondath, and portions of Aglarond, the Sea of Fallen Stars, and the Shaar. What was once called Halruaa detonated and was destroyed when every inscribed and prepared spell in the nation went off simultaneously. This explosion was partly to blame for destroying the land bridge between Chult and the Shining South ... only a scattered archipelago remains.

Tendrils of the Change Plague reached many other corners of Faerûn, sometimes directly across the landscape, othertimes bypassing great swathes of land by infecting both sides of the many two-way portals that once dotted the world.

Pockets of active Spellplague still exist today, most famously in the Changing Land. Referred to as plaguelands, each one is strange and dangerous. No two possess the exact same landscape or features, save for the fact that entering could lead one to be infected by the Spellplague. Luckily, remnant plaguelands possess only a fraction of the vigor demonstrated in the Spellplague's initial appearance. These lingering Spellplague pockets are secreted away in hard-to-reach locales, often surrounded by twisted no-man's land. Most of Faerûn and Returned Abeir are entirely free of such pockets, though the plaguechanged and spellscarred may appear in any land.

Effects on Creatures

When the initial wave of Spellplague infected a creature, object, or spell, the target usually dissolved into so much glowing, dissipating ash. However, sometimes living creatures survived the plague's touch but were altered, twisted, or fused to another creature or even a portion of the landscape. The initial Change Plague wave had no regard for boundaries or species, or the ability of a changed entity to survive with its new form, powers, and limitations. The most unlucky of these mewling, hideously changed survivors perished within a few days.

Luckily, the initial wave directly touched relatively few parts of Toril and Abeir. Moreover, not all creatures, objects, or spells touched by the original Spellplague were doomed, but to have survived meant having to accept change. Living creatures so affected are differentiated into two broad groups: plaguechanged and spellscarred.

Plaguechanged

A massive change in body and mind marks a creature that has survived contact with the original wave of the Spellplague during the Year of Blue Fire. Such survivors are called the Plaguechanged. Extreme alterations forge potent monstrosities in even the meekest flesh. Plaguechanged creatures are monsters, driven slightly insane by the viciousness of their metamorphosis. Few of this generation survive today, because the initial plague was so virulent, and the changes wrought were so extreme. What's more, many decades have passed since the Spellplague's end, so most plaguechanged creatures simply died in the interim. A few of the horrifying monstrosities remain, though, hidden away in various corners of the world.

Spellscarred

Spellscars are a phenomena of the present, gained when someone moves too close to a plagueland (where active Spellplague yet lingers), though sometimes spellscars afflict people who've never had any contact with rampant magic. Some individuals ... heroes and villains alike ... can gain spellscars and learn to master the powers inherent in them.

On rare occasions, a spellscar appears as a physical abnormality, but more often it is an intangible mark that only appears when its owner calls upon it. When this happens, a spellscar might appear as jagged cracks of blue fire racing out across a spellscarred's forearms or hands, a corona of blue flame igniting the creature's hair, a flaming blue glyph on the creature's forehead, or perhaps even wings of cobalt flame. In many instances, an individual's sudden manifestation of blue fire is a reliable indicator of a spellscar.

Magic in the Year of The Ageless One

The ancient wonder of old magic yet lingers among the ruins of thousand-year-old empires, in crumbling towers of mad wizards, and in buried vaults of elder races. The modern marvels of living wizards, sorcerers, warlocks, clerics, druids, and other spellcasters stride the land as purposefully as they ever did, altering the world in small or large ways with each spell they cast. Indeed, without the divine restrictions of previous ages, magic is more abundant than ever, manifesting not only as inexplicable changes to the landscape, items, and creatures, but even in some of the most fantastic exploits of fighters, rogues, rangers, and other heroes. Magic truly does permeate all things. For all the changes wrought by the Mystra's death, magic remains the lifeblood of Toril.

About the Author

Bruce Cordell is a **D&D** designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Countdown to the Realms

Spellplague: The Wailing Years

by Brian James

02/27/2008

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Excerpt from the journal of Arleenaya Kithmaer, First Magistrati of the House of the High One Ascendant, Year of Blue Fire (1385 DR)

"Reaching out northwest from beyond the horizon's rim, I beheld a sight which was at once horrifying as it was beautiful; a stormlike catastrophe rolling across the sky, which seemed to be ablaze with blue fire. Frozen in stupefying awe, I witnessed the cerulean thunderhead crash into the mighty Lhairghal, throwing pillars of azure fire skyward to snatch at Selûne's calming light. Selûne, my gods! The surface of the moon, long presented to us mortals as a barren landscape of craters and lifeless valleys, now revealed to me majestic mountains and sprawling seas; itself alight with similar cobalt radiance. A nearby exclamation from the Magehound returned my attention earthward to witness a shimmering wall of sapphire flame racing down Mhair Pass. Five breaths longer and the storm would crash into the battlement upon which I stood with a handful of loomwardens. I recall hastily whispered prayers to Azuth, a moment of unqualified stillness, and then nothing."

As dusk fell over the Shining South on the 29th day of Tarsakh in the Year of Blue Fire (1385 DR), a menacing storm began forming over the Mhair Jungles west of Halruaa. Beyond its massive size, the storm was particularly notable for the ribbons of blue flame that seemed to writhe and flow among its formations. In the mountains near Lhair in western Halruaa, dumbfounded priests watched in absolute silence, unable to comprehend the terrible events unfolding on the horizon. What the clerics of Azuth could not possibly fathom was that three score or more similar storms sprang up all across Toril; born instantly upon the assassination of Mystra in her heavenly dominion. Arleenaya Kithmaer and four nearby priests were teleported to safety by a quick-thinking magehound. The nation of Halruaa, however, would suffer horribly that ill-fated night. The three great mountain ranges that oft protected the nation from external invasion actually made it difficult for many Halruaans to escape the uncontrolled wild magic unleashed across the countryside. Halruaa today is best known as a magical wasteland; it is also the birthplace of the roving mercenary bands known as the Five Companies.

The cerulean storm and its aftereffects would become known in later days as the Spellplague. Despite its name, the Spellplague was no mere magical affliction. The Spellplague burned fiercest in its first year, but flareups and indirect repercussions continued for decades, irrevocably altering whole regions while leaving others completely unscathed. Whole countries vanished in earthquakes, fires, and windstorms, inexplicably replaced with peoples and lands from a world beyond our own. Even the starry constellations in the Sea of Night seemingly rearranged themselves in the heavens above. Scholars in later years would name this decade of chaos and upheaval the Wailing Years, or simply the Plague Years. For more details on the Spellplague and the secondary catastrophes that followed in its wake, check out the *Countdown to the Realms* preview article Magic in the Forgotten Realms.

The Wailing Years

In game terms, the Spellplague represents the definitive event for transitioning the setting from one rules system to the next, and the loss of the Weave will have a profound effect on arcane spellcasters in your campaign. Though a small percentage of mages are driven to madness at the outset of the Spellplague, it's recommended you spare your players from this ignoble fate. Instead, wizards and other arcane spellcasters find that their magic has gone wild or departed altogether. In effect, all of Abeir-Toril is blanketed by a massive zone of wild magic. Refer to the 3rd Edition ***Forgotten Realms*** *Campaign Setting* (page 55) for Table 2 - 1 of Wild Magic Effects. As the Weave unravels throughout the month of Nightal in the Year of Blue Fire, these wild magic zones are quickly replaced with dead magic zones until one day arcane magic ceases to function altogether.

DMs might wish to take advantage of the Wailing Years to run a low magic/melee-centric campaign using rules or concepts from sourcebooks such as *Tome of Battle: Book of Nine Swords* or *Iron Heroes*. Otherwise it might be wise to simply move your campaign forward to the Year of Silent Death (1395 DR) or beyond, where direct effects of the Spellplague have largely subsided and most spellcasters have once again gained mastery of their magic. See the section below on the Vilhon Reach for a description of a functioning *time portal* you might wish to use for this purpose.

Included below is a timeline of key events that occurred during the Wailing Years, which can be useful to a transitional campaign set in the kingdom of Cormyr or the Vilhon Reach. Following the timeline is a brief update of these two regions, including sample adventure hooks.

Timeline

1385 DR (Year of Blue Fire)
The Spellplague: An unthinkable catastrophe ensues when Cyric, aided and abetted by Shar, murders Mystra in Dweomerheart. The plane itself disintegrates at once, destroying Savras and sending the gods Azuth and Velsharoon reeling into the endless Astral Sea. Without Mystra to govern the Weave, magic bursts its bonds all across Toril and the surrounding planes and runs wild. In Faerûn, this event is known as the Spellplague. Thousands of mages are driven insane or destroyed, and the very substance of the world becomes mutable beneath veils of azure fire that dance across the skies by night or by day.

- Where once stood the realm of Sespech, the Golden Plains, and the Nagalands, the Spellplague reveals a surreal landscape breathtaking in its beauty, grandeur, and changeability. For the next century, active Spellplague cavorts on this territory called the Plaguewrought Lands, contorting terrain, natural law, and the flesh of any creature that dares enter.
- Cormyr is struck hard, but not so violently as many other nations. Roughly one third of all Wizards of War are slain, driven mad, or simply have gone missing in the year following Mystra's death.

1386 DR (Year of the Halfling's Lament)
A portion of Toril's sibling world Abeir violently exchanges places with large sections of Chondath and western Chessenta. Displaced genasi from the Abeiran land of Shyr quickly set about creating a kingdom of their own.

- The former expanse of the Sea of Fallen Stars is altered when wide portions of the landscape collapse into the Underdark. When the sea level reaches its new equilibrium, the average drop in water level measured nearly 50 feet. The waters of the Vilhon Reach were similarly drained, uncovering several drowned ruins from ancient Jhaamdath.

1387 DR (Year of the Emerald Ermine)
The Emerald Enclave begins sending agents throughout the Vilhon Wilds to counter the effects of the Spellplague. As years became decades, their original mission is slowly perverted from one of respect for and guardianship of nature to a vain struggle against forces far beyond their control.

1388 DR (Year of the Tanarukka)
Bullywugs tribes from the Farsea Marshes begin harrying Zhentarim forces operating throughout the Tunlands, diminishing Black Network activities in the region.

- Some members of Cormyr's remaining War Wizards, having lost access to the Art, begin cross-training with the Purple Dragons in swordplay and martial defense. In years to come these *swordmages* will prove invaluable against neighboring aggression in the region.

1389 DR (Year of the Forgiven Foes)
A strangely angular black monolith is sometimes visible breaking above the waves along Cormyr's coast, never in the same place twice.

1390 DR (Year of the Walking Man)
Dowager Dragon Queen, Filfaeril Selazair Obarskyr, dies. Alusair attends the state funeral, argues briefly and privately with her nephew the king, and disappears altogether from Court. Rumors persist of her riding through the frontiers and borderlands, but no confirmed reports of her appearance exist following the burial of Filfaeril.

1391 DR (Year of the Wrathful Eye)
The human druid Zalaznar Crinios, transformed into a mighty treant for his service to nature, takes hold of the druid circle in Cedarspoke. A lesser druid, able to take lion form and calling himself Firemane, rises to prominence in the same circle.

1392 DR (Year of the Scroll)
The Dragon Coast city of Pros petitions the Crown to become a vassal-state of Cormyr in order to protect it from the ravages of the Spellplague. Azoun V reluctantly accepts. By year's end, Pros' sister-town of Ilipur joins the Forest Kingdom as well. Unfortunately the receding waters of the Sea of Fallen Stars have spelled ruin for these small trading towns.

1393 DR (Year of the Ring)
Sembian investors begin buying up land in the southern Dales. Concerned, Azoun V issues a formal objection to the Dale's Council in Archendale but the King's emissary is rebuffed.

- Spellscarred beings and pilgrims hoping to obtain a spellscar begin journeying to the Plaguewrought Lands in large numbers. They are welcomed in Ormpetarr by the Order of Blue Fire.

1394 DR (Year of Deaths Unmourned)
The Grand Cabal of the Emerald Enclave begins attempting to stem the tide of spellscarred pilgrims that pass through Turmish.

- Years of straining with their conflicted Sembian and Cormyrean identities, and struggling against the rule of Netheril, culminates in the annexation of the border city of Daerlun into the Forest Kingdom.

1395 DR (Year of Silent Death)
Sakkors, the Netherese floating enclave not seen since the days before the Spellplague, makes a reappearance over Daerlun in the dead of night. The following morning civil unrest breaks out throughout the city. Azoun V sends elite swordmages to restore order in the city.

Vilhon Reach

The lands of the Vilhon Reach were affected greatly by the merging of Abeir with Toril. The waters of the Reach itself were partially drained during the Spellplague, revealing several drowned Cities of the Sword from ancient Jhaamdath. The once welcoming and cosmopolitan folk of Turmish have grown increasingly xenophobic throughout the Wailing Years. Akanûl, formerly the lands of Chondath, are now populated by genasi from the Abeiran land of Shyr, a region that will barely survive its first contact with the Abolethic Sovereignty some years later. Since the Year of Blue Fire, civilization has been slow to return to the wilder Spellplague-morphed regions. The notorious Plaguewrought Lands lie close by, contorting terrain, natural law, and the flesh of any creature that dares enter.

The Vilhon Reach is a great example of the new "Tone and Feel" of the setting in action, making it a great region to explore some of the more fantastic locales on Faerûn.

- **ANDRIO'S GATE:** The Reach happens to contain one of Toril's few functioning *time gates*; a useful tool for bringing characters forward beyond the Wailing Years (1385 DR to 1395 DR) to a more stable time period for campaign play. The *time gate* is located within Mount Andrus, a volcanic peak within the Orsraun Mountains on Turmish's western frontier. There the *time gate* has survived millennia despite several volcanic eruptions, shielded from the monstrous heat and the effects of the Spellplague by powerful, and some would say divine, wards. Adrio's Gate is activated by speaking the name of a year as given in the Roll of Years then stepping through the *gate*'s event horizon.

Tone and Feel

One part of creating a new edition of the **Forgotten Realms** is re-envisioning the look of Faerûn and creating a new interpretation of this classic fantasy setting. We've decided to shift the visuals of the setting toward a slightly more fantastic look, drawing inspiration from many sources ... for example, the exquisite visuals of artists such as Roger Dean or Frank Frazetta (without the nudity, it's a PG game). We sometimes think of this as playing **D&D** in a world that looks just a little bit like the cover of a *Yes* album. High fantasy doesn't mean that the Realms are turning into a magical steampunk setting. **Eberron** already has elemental-powered airships and trains, and that is not the direction set for the **Realms**.

Instead, the landscape itself is often spectacular, striking, and magical. Of course each region maintains its own distinctive flavor; Waterdeep isn't adrift on a floating earthmote, and the Dalelands still have plenty of farmland and forest - with just a little touch of the fantastic here and there.

Turmish

Turmish suffered much less than Chondath, but the partial draining of the Sea of Fallen Stars did leave its busy port at Alaghôn high and dry. Today, this realm of increasingly competitive and desperate merchant costers is also a through-route for fanatics on spellscar pilgrimages to the Plaguewrought Lands. The once welcoming and cosmopolitan Turmishans have grown increasingly xenophobic, and they are guarded and suspicious of strangers, even though they remain dependent on outside trade.

North and west of Turmish beyond the Orsraun and Alaoreum Mountains stretches the forested realm of Gulthandor. Gulthandor has no ties with the largely disbanded organization once known as the Emerald Enclave. Ilighôn, once the island home of the Enclave, became part of mainland Turmish when the seas retreated in 1386 DR.

- **YURGRIM'S DELVE:** Alaghôn remains the capital of Turmish; the city's curious architecture is the result of the Chondathan humans building over existing structures left by a previous dwarven civilization. The dwarves also left an abandoned mine -- a maze of subterranean tunnels, vaults, and catacombs that have never been fully explored, or fully rid of monsters -- beneath the city streets. Few entrances to the Undercity remain, but adventurers continue to brave their dark reaches in search of plunder. A few ancient tomes make reference to a lich queen from Unther residing below the palace, yet most discount these accounts as wild tales of fiction.
- **PRIDE OF FIREMANE:** Zalaznar Crinios (NE treant druid 12), has secretly turned away from the teachings of Mielikki to embrace Malar, who "rewarded" the High Druid by transforming him into a treant. Crinios used this transformation as proof he is meant to lead in Gulthandor. Dark creatures now threaten the forest, as well as nearby settlements. Unaware of Crinios's duplicity, a druid who prefers lion form and calls himself Firemane has put out the call for those willing to purge the forest of whatever blight grows at its heart.

Chondath

A portion of Toril's sibling world Abeir violently exchanged places with large sections of Chondath and western Chessenta during the Spellplague. The shattered ruins of cities lie broken at the bottom of ravines or thrust high atop stone spires, a constant draw to adventurers seeking troves of lost gold. The land today is characterized by crazed stone spires, cavernous ravines, and cliffs like petrified waves. Freefloating earthmotes host miniature forests, grasslands, lakes, and ever-replenishing waterfalls that mist the land below in draperies of mist. The wild landscape is perfectly suited to the tempestuous population of genasi that now claim the land as their own. Akanûl is the name of this genasi-ruled realm, and the capital city of Airspur holds the bulk of the nation's population. The waters of the Vilhon Reach were partially drained during the Spellplague, revealing several ruined Cities of the Sword, lost since the last days of Jhaamdath. Travelers to the region are few and far between. The few who travel through this treacherous floodplain return with madness or not at all.

The Chondalwood is a confusion of ravines and floating junglemotes, some sailing free, others webbed to lower jungle regions by thick vines and vegetation. The Chondalwood's vigor is impressive -- it grew in the Spellplague's wake instead of being diminished or being erased by it; witness its colonizing junglemotes spreading like airborne seeds north, south, and east, and west. The halflings and centaurs that once roamed these woods are now gone; replaced with spellscarred satyrs and feral elves who declare blood feud on any outsider entering the jungle's heartwood.

- **LESSER OF TWO EVILS:** During a violent spring thunderstorm, a strange angular black monolith is spotted in the shallow waters off the Nun Coast near Reth. The following morning, kuo-toa harpooners flying strange winged morkoth attack the port city. The invaders are repelled by High Lady Glorganna and a detachment of Banite guerrillas. It remains unclear what the Abolethic Sovereignty was seeking in the city -- half of which lies in shattered ruin at the bottom of the Bay of Silvanus.

- **MAGEDOOM:** At the center of the Chondalwood is a ruin of ancient, toppled stone towers whose cellars are packed with lost treasures. The elves of Wildhome steer well clear of it, citing terrible bodiless guardian creatures that ravage flesh, inspire madness, and target spellcasters in particular, igniting them like torches.

Plaguewrought Lands
Where once stood the realm of Sespech, the Golden Plains, and the Nagalands, now stands a surreal landscape breathtaking in its beauty, grandeur, and changeability. Active Spellplague still cavorts on this territory, contorting terrain, natural law, and the flesh of any creature that dares enter. Earthmotes aplenty break up the sky in a strange parity with the fractured terrain below. Swaths of moving earth change with mercurial speed, and great ravines empty directly into the Underdark. Artist renditions that capture true glimpses of the place's exquisite loveliness and horrific strangeness can command large sums back in civilized lands.

- **SCAR PILGRIMAGE:** Plaguechanged and pilgrims hoping to obtain a spellscar sometimes journey here because it's the most prominent plagueland in Faerûn, as well as a great hold of the Order of Blue Fire. The stability of the plagueland's border provides an environment where the clever, ambitious, or insane can experiment with the Spellplague and its effects. As with most who brave plaguelands, few pilgrims who enter the Plaguewrought Lands are ever seen again, but those who do return sometimes claim newfound power.

Cormyr

Unlike the lands of the Vilhon Reach, the nation of Cormyr suffered little geological upheaval during the Spellplague Years. Instead the upheaval in the Forest Kingdom was largely political. Famine, economic hardship, and unrest among the peerage would be difficult for any ruling monarch, yet these challenges perhaps weighed more heavily upon the shoulders of young King Azoun V. Claiming the Dragon Throne in the Year of Three Streams Blooded (1384 DR), Azoun had merely thirteen winters behind him at his coronation and only sixteen months on the throne before the Spellplague sent the world spinning into chaos. Thankfully, the king surrounded himself with men and women of wise counsel, including the Caladnei, Mage Royal of Cormyr. Under his rule, the Forest Kingdom quickly recovered from the anarchy of the Wailing Years, and the young king went on to become a just, wise, and long-lived ruler.

Motes
After the plague of change, some elements of the physical world have gained a supernatural independence from certain natural laws. The most striking of these (to those unfamiliar with them) are motes. Motes are free-floating bits of landscape that defy gravity to hover in place over certain locales (usually, those locales most affected by the Spellplague). These motes are usually small in size, but whole ecosystems cling to them, apparently sustained by the more natural landscape over or through which a particular mote floats.

Motes are often referred to according to the type of landscape each sports. Thus, there are junglemotes, fungusmotes, cavemotes, grassmotes, pinemotes, and so on. Larger motes might support animal life, including humanoids.

The Helmlands
Formed during the Time of Troubles, this desolate land of howling winds and jagged rock was the site of Mystra's destruction at the hands of Helm in the Year of Shadows (1358 DR). In the months following its creation, locals named the site the Pits of Mystra, for the land was nothing but bubbling tar pits as far as the eye could see. Priests dedicated to the new Goddess of Magic cleansed the land of the fetid pits in later years, but the tear in the fabric of the Weave remained. Today a forest of towering redwoods has returned; the original was lost when Mystra's dying energy blasted the land like a million Shou cannons. In the wake of the Spellplague, the Helmlands have grown, spreading along the northern wall of the Stormhorns, stretching as far west as the foothills above Eveningstar. Wild magic still pervades the entire region, but unlike the Plaguewrought Lands, visitors can enter the Helmslands without fear of becoming spellscarred.

- **TEMPLE ACHERON:** Once the blasted ruin of Castle Kilgrave, the imposing stronghold was rebuilt by priests of Bane following his apparent resurrection in the Year of Wild Magic (1372 DR). As the Lord of Strife himself had done during the Time of Troubles, the strifelords reshaped the ruins into an echo of Bane's Temple of the Suffering in the Barrens of Doom and Despair. Thirty-foot-high walls constructed of a seamless other-worldly material of black laced with green connect the windowless towers on four corners, and on the west side a towering 60-foot obelisk encloses a drawbridge set against the wall. Purple Dragon Knights stationed at Castle Crag patrol the eastern perimeter of the Helmslands daily, keeping a vigilant eye for any threats coming from Temple Acheron.

Farsea Swamp
This slowly growing swamp consists of two formerly separate marshes, Farsea and Tun. The swamp has mile after mile of muddy terrain swept with golden-green tall grasses broken by channels of bronze water. Most citizens of Cormyr see the wetlands as dark, forbidding places, where evil festers and foul creatures lurk in murky water to devour the unwary. While this image is largely true of the deadly Vast Swamp in eastern Cormyr, it is an incomplete and misleading portrayal of the Farsea Swamp.

- **LEGACY OF THE BATRACHI:** Amid the vast, fog-laced expanse of the Farsea Swamp rests the scattered ruins of a vanished civilization, not Netherese as many have speculated. Thick with poisonous insects and plague, few enough have glimpsed these ruins. Ornate buildings made of glass as strong as steel hint at a magical technology lost to the present day. Rumors have it that the bold can claim gold and strange secrets from the half-drowned basements, if they can but survive the swamp's pestilence and withstand the might of strange creatures set as guardians within the interior of the glassteel towers.

Hullack Forest
Dark and foreboding best describes the thick dense woods of the Hullack Forest. The Hullack is almost a primeval forest, with dark valleys and hidden vales that have gone unseen for decades. Ghostly creatures and odd monsters pepper the local folklore, and orcs and goblins are frequent visitors from the Thunder Peaks. In the years immediately preceding the Spellplague, large numbers of adventurers entered the forest seeking to clear it of monsters and explore its deeper regions. Thunderstone, a small town on the southern edge of Hullack Forest, was often used as a base of operations for such expeditions.

These crown-sanctioned activities came to an abrupt end in the Year of the Wrathful Eye (1391 DR) when the Eldreth Veluuthra, a militant group of human-despising elves, claimed the forest as their own. A brief conflict with the elves ensued in the Year of Deaths Unmourned (1394 DR), but young King Azoun V later turned his full attention to more pressing threats from neighboring Netheril and Sembia.

- **REALM OF WAILING FOG:** Sandwiched between the Hullack Forest and the Thunder Peaks, the Realm of Wailing Fog remains a land of desolate fens, ever-present mist, and eerie echoing calls. Even the Eldreth Veluuthra dare not explore the realm's long-ruined towers. Travelers to the region speak of a heavy feeling of "watchfulness" hanging over everything. Rumors persist that a coven of hags lives in the area, but these claims have never been substantiated.

About the Author

A software engineering manager by day and **Forgotten Realms** aficionado by night, Brian R. James authored the *Grand History of the Realms* and continues to serve up new Realmslore through **D&D Insider** and the *Candlekeep Compendium*. Brian also contributed to the forthcoming 4E ***Forgotten Realms*** *Campaign Guide* to be released later this year. In his spare time he enjoys exploring *EverQuest II* with his fae shadowknight Iakhovas and pretending he's a good drummer on *Rock Band*. Brian lives in Montana with his high school sweetheart Toni and their four children.

Elder Evils: Shothragot

by Robert J. Schwalb, Art by Ryan Barger
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Dragon Features Archive
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"The Ender, the Elder Elemental Eye, the Dark God, the Patient One, He Who Waits, the Anathema, the Father of Elder Evils, the Author of Wickedness, He of Eternal Darkness, the Eater of Worlds, the Despised, the Undoer -- these are but a few of the many names for our glorious master. One thousand years, the Dark God has waited, lurking beyond the bounds of reality, contained in a vault constructed by jealous hands, his rightful throne held by usurpers. In these last centuries, our efforts have found destruction, decay, and loss, as these lesser powers have sought to confuse us, mislead us, and turn us against one another, for you see, Tharizdun's release spells their end. They fear him. Yes, mighty Boccob, Heironeous, even that sad crone Beory all quail before his imminent arrival. The time is at hand, the end has come, and it is our sacred duty to usher in the last age of our world and bring the constructs of the false gods to rightful ruin. Only then will we understand the perfect nature of all that is possible with the Eternal Darkness."

This June sees the debut of 4th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons**, and with this new edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game comes a variety of exciting changes and opportunities. As your 3rd Edition game draws to a close, what better way is there to conclude years of exciting play than a climactic encounter with mind-blowing evil? *Elder Evils* is your toolbox for wrapping up your old campaigns with a bang and helping you lay the foundation for a whole host of new adventures in the future.

The notion of the elder evil was first presented in *Lords of Madness* to reflect the incredibly powerful creatures worshiped by the aboleths as gods. But these are no gods; they are abominations -- terrible forces of destruction and change whose mere appearance signals a signature change in the world. Whether by triggering an apocalyptic end, causing some cataclysm to reshape the continents, or even just altering the fundamental nature of magic, these beings wield great power. Such figures have long been with **D&D**, even if not named such, and can be found among the abominations in the *Epic Level Handbook* or further back with the tarrasque, powerful demon princes, inexplicable powers that defy description, and, rarely, among some gods, specifically Tharizdun.

This special article that ties in to *Elder Evils* showcases one of the most iconic forces of evil in the **D&D** game, revealing the danger posed by Tharizdun on a larger cosmological scale by presenting his chief minion, the elder evil named Shothragot. As with the entries in the *Elder Evils* sourcebook, you should consider the information here to be a collection of ideas to help you end your campaign. The statistics presented are the baseline values for the type of adversary they represent and should your campaign feature much higher level PCs, you should advance the elder evil using the normal rules found in the *Monster Manual*. Finally, to see Shothragot in action, complete with all the dire consequences his presence promises, be sure to check out *Essence of Evil* in *Dungeon* 152.

Background

It is telling that the origins of the Dark God are buried beneath layers of secrecy. All faiths oppose the cults who serve He of Eternal Darkness, and to whisper his name is tantamount to blasphemy. The fear Tharizdun evokes and the intensity of his opposition are all well-founded since even the gods themselves, good and evil alike, share this trepidation. The reason is simple: The Ebon God wants nothing more than to unravel the nature of reality, to undo all the works of gods and mortals, to shatter the planes, and dissolve all things to their fundamental natures. Tharizdun is an uncaring force of destruction, motivated by an inexplicable need to eradicate all things, himself included **(Knowledge [religion] DC 15)**.

Since Tharizdun works always to bring ruin, the gods set aside their differences and sealed the dreadful power away, holding him in stasis so his malign will and countless servants could no longer threaten the balance of the cosmos. And though the gods returned to squabbling soon after his imprisonment eons ago, they remain united in their distaste and fear of their ancient enemy and, to this day, they are all committed to ensuring he remains safely tucked away beyond the reach of misguided fools **(DC 20)**. That the Dark God remains sealed away in a prison plane in some forgotten corner of the multiverse, though, is no consolation. The divine seals may contain him, but Tharizdun can extend his malign will beyond them, caressing the minds of his servants and impelling them to do his bidding **(DC 25)**. Assuming the guise of the Elder Elemental Eye, he has accumulated numerous disturbing cults that swear their allegiance to the multifaceted nature of their insane master, fighting each other as much as they move toward their unholy mission of releasing a power whose fullness and wickedness they only dimly realize **(DC 30)**.

Champions of the various gods and agencies remain vigilant against the legions of the Elder Elemental Eye, by sacking their temples, raiding their redoubts, and executing cultists wherever they find them, but few realize the true breadth of Tharizdun's power. A small body of scholars and sages believes that Tharizdun's greatest servants are the elder evils themselves. So while the courageous heroes fight Tharizdun's minions, the Dark God compels the elder evils to stir and awaken so that they may ravage the world and weaken its gods. Tharizdun hopes that when he finally weakens the wards holding him, he will emerge unopposed **(DC 35)**.

While various elder evils may or may not respond to the summons of the Dark God, Tharizdun's chief creation, an abomination named Shothragot, awoke in the cyclopean depths of the earth, far below the mines of a temple devoted to the Elder Elemental Eye. Weak and nearly powerless after years of undisturbed slumber, it siphons power from the prayers of the unwitting servants above, biding its time until it gains the strength it needs to set in motion the final events that would see its master free **(DC 40)**.

While having an awakened elder evil is terrifying to conceive by itself, Shothragot is a special case, for this dreadful horror's origins trace back to the Invoked Devastation and the Rain of Colorless Fire, when Tharizdun's servants summoned forth his avatar for the last time **(Knowledge [history] DC 30)**. Whether or not its appearance compelled the use of appalling magic that brought death and devastation to hundreds of thousands is a matter of debate, but what is known is that almost as fast as the avatar appeared, so too did he vanish after the wrought destruction **(DC 35)**. Most scholars suspect the avatar was destroyed in the conflagration **(DC 40)**, but in truth, it was weakened, dreadfully so, and the powerful energies unleashed left the avatar crippled **(DC 45)**. Thus it fled into the bowels of the earth, where it waited **(DC 40)**.

Shothragot might have laid in wait forever, but its slumber was disturbed when a most unfortunate happenstance occurred. A band of adventurers, whose purpose was to destroy a cult of the Elder Elemental Eye infesting the mines around a fortress of wickedness, found their own deaths, nearly to the man. When a fleeing survivor became lost and stumbled into the elder evil crÃ¨che, Shothragot awoke, seized the mortal, and refashioned him using the last spark of divine essence to make him his principle servant (see *Shadow of Shothragot: The Price of Survival* for details). With his new agent in the field and with the prayers dedicated to the Elder Elemental Eye infusing him with power, the elder evil now swells with power and is nearly ready to reveal itself and bring about the release of its beloved master.

Goals

Shothragot's nature as both avatar and elder evil fills its mind with a deep and abiding desire to reunite with Tharizdun and restore the exiled god to the fullness of his being **(Knowledge [religion] DC 30)**. The elder evil is not quite aware of its own divine origins thanks to many centuries spent trapped deep within the earth, but at some instinctual level, it recognizes this need and thus it devotes all of its being toward completing this objective. What it does know is that it has many enemies arrayed against it, and so it is careful not to reveal itself until such time that it is strong enough to smash those who stand against it.

Its need for joining Tharizdun fills its thoughts, but it has no clear understanding of how it should go about achieving this end. The only thing it receives are fleeting images, disparate memories of sensations and emotions, and a deep and abiding hatred. From time to time, a face swims into its consciousness, and when it appears, it compels its minions to seek out and destroy these individuals, although even it knows not why. In truth, it is Tharizdun himself who dispatches these messages to remove obstacles that would prevent Shothragot from completing its mission.

Of late, Shothragot has become aware of a number of black jewels, 333 to be exact, known as the Gems of Tharizdun. It's not certain, but it suspects these items are integral to dissolving the wards holding his master in stasis. Thus, while its agents go out and murder his enemies, they are ever watchful for the 333 Gems of Tharizdun, which they bring back to the growing elder evil. Shothragot consumes and destroys each one they return to him, bloating on the released energy while simultaneously sending currents of destructive energies through Tharizdun's oubliette.

Using this Elder Evil

Introducing Shothragot to your campaign signals a looming and devastating event that could have sweeping repercussions and may very well alter the fundamental nature of your campaign setting. Shothragot, as presented here, is close to unlocking the prison, having absorbed nearly all of the Gems of Tharizdun. To seed the plot into an existing campaign, consider using the following campaign structure. Each adventure seed includes an Encounter Level to help establish when the specific events should occur in the campaign. As well, each also includes the strength of the elder evil's sign (see **Signs of the Apocalypse** sidebar for details).

EL 3: While exploring a dungeon, the player characters come upon a vault bearing the bas-relief carvings of numerous holy and unholy symbols, representing nearly every known god and quite a few unknown ones as well. Beyond the door, the player characters find a freezing cold room with walls, floor, and ceiling blackened and cracked. Hovering in the center of the room is a black gem the size of a fist. The stone is surrounded by a *wall of force*, preventing the PCs from acquiring it through normal means. If the PCs free the stone, they find themselves constantly harassed by agents of Tharizdun until they rid themselves of the cursed object.

EL 6: A few months later, a powerful earthquake ripples through the lands, causing terrible destruction for hundreds of miles around. While traveling through the ruins, the player characters come upon a community buried in a landslide. While little remains other than rubble and debris, one structure stands intact: a slender tower at the center of the community. It appears as if the tumbling boulders veered around the tower. Investigating the place reveals a number of traps, magical guardians, and more, but worse, the PCs aren't the only ones exploring the site. Also present are several insane cultists who plunder the place in search of something.

At the top of the tower, the cultists find what they're looking for -- a black gem, identical to the one the PCs found earlier in the dungeon. A thrilling fight takes place, but before the PCs can slay all the villains, one slips away with the gem in hand.

EL 9 (Faint Sign): After weeks of quiet, when life just starts to return to normal, a queer fiery glyph appears in the sky. Attempts to reach it through magic utterly fail; it always seems to move just out of reach. No one seems to know what it signifies, but certain types of spells are becoming harder to cast.

Tharizdun, peering into the future, senses the PCs are a dire threat, and so it dispatches a dream to Shothragot, who in turn sends its greatest minion, Giorge Forsworn (see *Shadow of Shothragot: The Price of Survival* for details), to attend to them. The mortal hunter plays a cat-and-mouse game, murdering those closest to the PCs first and then picking off the heroes one at a time.

EL 12 (Moderate Sign): As the sign in the sky intensifies, the greatest minds in the lands set to unravel the mystery of its appearance. A wide range of theories abound, but Jallarzi Sallavarian, a powerful wizard and member of the Circle of Eight (or some other arcane group), is close and she believes the glyph signifies a dire threat to the world, suspecting it may have something to do with Tharizdun. Well-acquainted with the history of the Dark God, she sets out for the Sea of Dust to find the Forgotten City in the hopes of unraveling the mystery of the glyph.

When she doesn't return, the remaining members of the Circle of Eight, who work to undo the expanding sign, hire the adventurers to track the missing wizard. Enduring a long and perilous journey and exploring the haunted ruins of the ancient city, the adventurers learn the history of the avatar, but not before being confronted by the warped Jallarzi, who, through dabbling with dangerous magic, has become a twisted creature of the Dark God.

EL 15 (Strong Sign): Armed with the information uncovered in the Forgotten City and burdened with the horrible fate of an esteemed member of the Circle, the adventurers return to the Circle of Eight, only to find that the sign has grown even stronger. Cross-referencing their information with that of the powerful wizards, Mordenkainen suggests the heroes explore former strongholds of Tharizdun's cultists to see if they can learn of some way to stop the impending apocalypse. The PCs journey to the Temple of Elemental Evil, the Crater Ridge Mines, and other locations, each site revealing a bit more about the enemy they face.

EL 18 (Overwhelming Sign): Just as the heroes are exploring the final known site, the caldera formed by the Crater Ridge explodes, and amidst the debris and destruction rises a massive globe of dripping black corruption. As it rises, the sign in the heavens expands until it stretches from one horizon to the next. Horrific insane creatures come and go from the bulk, emerging from orifices that pierce its glistening hide. The sign's power prevents the Circle of Eight from arriving here quickly, so it falls to the PCs to journey inside this floating abomination and destroy the essence that lurks within. Should they fail, Shothragot will surely unlock the wards that seal Tharizdun and draw forth the gods in a climactic battle that will leave the world forever after changed.

Shothragot in Eberron
Tharizdun is a powerful daelkyr warlord, a being so profoundly evil and so immense in terms of magical power, he is very nearly a god. Despised by his fellow Daelkyr, they sealed him away in a vast prison within the Realm of Madness and set countless traps, guards, and vicious wards to ensure he never broke loose. Unfortunately, Tharizdun's minions, of which there are many beneath Eberron, seek to release their dark lord and busily create a weapon that will not only breach the Gatekeeper wards that keep them underground but also bridge the gulf between planes and release their dreadful master. This weapon is Shothragot.

Shothragot in Faerûn
Instead of being an avatar of Tharizdun, Shothragot is the creation of Ghaunadaur, an entity spawned to shatter the worshipers of all other gods and enable the Elder Eye to become master of all things. Shothragot is the principal instrument in his plans and the elder evil slaughters the worshipers of other gods to weaken them. Once the gods are brought low, Ghaunadaur plans to move against them, stealing their power for himself until he can challenge the architect of the universe -- Ao himself.

Description

Shothragot is not something that can be fought directly, for in its fully awakened form, it is a massive ball of glistening black tar pierced with scores of holes that burrow into its body. Instead, to combat this horror, one must destroy its consciousness, which hides within it bloated, tumescent form.

The essence of Shothragot is a 66-foot tall mountain of slippery black tar, reflecting in miniature the large form containing it. Bubbling up to the surface of its slick epidermis are twisted faces, crying out in agony or cackling with mad glee.

The essence of Shothragot holds centuries of memories, the untold suffering it endured as it fled the dreadful magic of the Baklunish and Suloise, and the agony and madness it embraced as its body reformed into its horribly bloated state. As intelligent and cunning as it is, hate consumes it, and any who dare confront it find only its unquenchable wrath.

ESSENCE OF SHOTHRAGOT CR 22
hp 350 (20 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/epic and good

CE Gargantuan outsider (air, chaos, earth, evil, extraplanar, fire, water)
Init +9; **Senses** blindsight 500 ft., *true seeing*; Listen +34, Spot +34
Aura madness (120 ft., DC 35), divine madness (100 miles)
Languages telepathy 1,000 ft.

AC 40, touch 22, flat-footed 39
(-4 size, +1 Dex, +15 deflection, +18 natural)
Immune ability damage, ability drain, cold, energy drain, fire, massive damage, mind-affecting effects, petrification, polymorph
Resist acid 20, electricity 20; **SR** 32
Fort +40, **Ref** +28, **Will** +38

Signs of the Apocalypse

As an elder evil grows in power, signs of its presence manifest themselves in the world. They may begin as subtle ones at first, but over time, they grow in intensity until they are nearly as dangerous as the elder evil itself.

Seals of Binding

The Seals of Binding interfere with most conjuration spells and many divination spells. By closing off the avenues enabling mortals to interact with the planes, clerics find their connections with the divine severed, summoned creatures remain trapped, and the most expedient means of travel cease to function.

Shothragot's sign appears as a strange fiery glyph in the sky. As the elder evil grows more powerful, the glyph expands, growing brighter and broader until it completely covers the heavens. To identify the features of the sign, a character may make a Knowledge (religion) check. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, it identifies the sign's strength. Success by 10 or more reveals the sign's full effects at all levels of strength.

Faint (DC 45): All conjuration (calling, summoning, and teleportation) and divination spells and spell-like abilities are impeded. A spellcaster must succeed on a Spellcraft check (DC 20 + the level of the spell) or the spell fails and the spell or spell slot is lost. In addition, spells that return creatures to their native plane, such as banishment or dismissal, automatically fail.

Moderate (DC 35): As *faint*, but also summoned creatures no longer return to their native plane when the spell expires. The creature remains under the caster's control for the duration, but is free to act normally once the duration expires.

Divine spellcasters cast their spells at -1 caster level, and turn or rebuke attempts take a -5 penalty on the check and damage rolls.

Strong (DC 25): As *moderate*, but when a conjuration (teleportation) spell or spell-like ability is cast, there's a 20% chance for a mishap. On a mishap, the caster and anyone else affected by the spell takes 5d6 points of damage.

Divine spellcasters cast their spells at -2 caster levels. As well, turning and rebuking attempts take a -10 penalty on the check and damage rolls.

Overwhelming (DC 15): All conjuration (calling, summoning, and teleportation) spells cease to function. Divination spells that contact extraplanar beings (*commune* and *contact other plane* for example) are likewise foiled. Divine spellcasters cast all spells at -4 caster levels and when praying for new spells, they have a 20% chance per spell of losing it. Also, turning and rebuking attempts take a -20 penalty on the check and damage rolls.

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares), fly 120 ft.; Spring Attack
Melee 4 tentacles +40 (2d6+24 plus corporeal instability) and
4 bites +35 (2d8+12 plus wounding)
Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.
Base Atk +20; **Grp** +56
Atk Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*chain lightning*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*cone of cold*), aligned strike (chaos, evil), epic strike, constrict 2d6+36, corporeal instability, elemental seepage, improved grab, tremendous blow, wounding
Special Actions summon black cyst
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):
At will -- *bolts of bedevilment* (ranged touch +17, DC 30)[SC], *chain lightning* (DC 31), *cone of cold* (DC 30), *control water*, *control weather*, *control winds*, *ice storm*, *magic missile*, *stone shape*, *wall of fire*, *wall of stone*
1/day -- *acid fog*, *earthquake* (PH 225), *fire storm* (DC 32), *insanity* (DC 32), *wall of force*, *whirlwind* (DC 33, PH 301)

Abilities Str 58, Dex 13, Con 36, Int 25, Wis 32, Cha 41
SA constrict, elemental seepage, force mastery, improved grab, sculpt flesh, summon black cyst, tremendous blow
SQ anathematic secrecy, force mastery, freedom of movement, nondetection, seals of binding, unholy blessing
Feats Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*chain lightning*)[B], Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*cone of cold*)[B], Spring Attack[B], Superior Initiative[ELH]
Skills Balance +34, Bluff +38, Concentration +36, Diplomacy +19, Disguise +15 (+17 acting), Hide +28, Intimidate +40, Jump +30, Knowledge (arcana) +30, Knowledge (history) +30, Knowledge (religion) +30, Listen +34, Move Silently +24, Sense Motive +34, Spellcraft +32 (+34 deciphering scrolls), Spot +34, Tumble +34, Use Magic Device +38 (+40 scrolls)

Regeneration (Ex) The essence of Shothragot takes lethal damage from good- and lawful-aligned attacks and spells and effects with the good or lawful descriptor.

True Seeing (Ex) As the *true seeing* spell, always active.

Aura of Madness (Su) At the beginning of each of the essence of Shothragot's turns, all living creatures within 120 feet take 1d6 points of Wisdom drain and are confused for 1 round. A DC 35 negates this effect.

Divine Madness (Su) All extraplanar outsiders with divine ranks that come within 100 miles of Shothragot are affected as if by the *insanity* spell (no save). When rolling to determine actions, any result that would have the afflicted creature attack the caster instead forces the god to attack the closest creature and not the elder evil.

Telepathy (Su) The essence of Shothragot can communicate telepathically with any creature that has a language and is within 1,000 feet.

Constrict (Ex) The essence of Shothragot deals 2d6+36 points of damage on a successful grapple check, in addition to damage from its tentacle attack.

Corporeal Instability (Su) A blow from the essence of Shothragot's tentacle attack against a living creature can cause a terrible transformation. The creature must succeed on a DC 33 Fortitude save or become a spongy, amorphous mass. Unless the victim controls the effect (see below), its shape melts, flows, writhes, and boils. The save DC is Constitution-based.

An affected creature is unable to hold or use any item. Clothing, armor, rings, and helmets become useless. Large items worn or carried -- armor, backpacks, even shirts -- hamper more than help, reducing the victim's Dexterity score by 4. Soft or misshapen feet and legs reduce speed to 10 feet or one-quarter normal, whichever is less. Searing pain courses along the nerves, so strong that the victim cannot act coherently. The victim cannot cast spells or use magic items, and it attacks blindly, unable to distinguish friend from foe (-4 penalty on attack rolls and a 50% miss chance, regardless of the attack roll).

Each round the victim spends in an amorphous state causes 1 point of Wisdom drain from mental shock. If the victim's Wisdom score falls to 0, it becomes a chaos beast (*MM* 33).

A victim can regain its own shape by taking a standard action to attempt a DC 15 Charisma check. A success reestablishes the creature's normal form for 1 minute. On a failure, the victim can still repeat this check each round until successful.

Corporeal instability is not a disease or a curse and so is hard to remove. A *shapechange* or *stoneskin* spell does not cure an afflicted creature but fixes its form for the duration of the spell. A *restoration*, *heal*, or *greater restoration* spell removes the affliction (a separate *restoration* is necessary to restore any drained points of Wisdom).

Elemental Seepage (Ex) Whenever the essence of Shothragot takes 20 or more points of damage from a single hit, it looses a blast of elemental energy dealing 1d6 points of acid damage, 1d6 points of cold damage, 1d6 points of electricity damage, and 1d6 points of fire damage to the creature that attacked it. A successful DC 33 Reflex save halves this damage.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, the essence of Shothragot must hit an opponent of any size with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Tremendous Blow (Ex) As a full-round action, the essence of Shothragot can make a devastating attack with a tentacle against a single opponent. If the attack hits, the target must immediately succeed on a DC 44 Fortitude save or fly straight back a number of 5-foot squares equal to the damage dealt. If the target strikes an object or a creature in its path, it stops, and it and the obstacle struck take 12d6+24 points of damage.

Wounding (Ex) Any living creature damaged by the essence of Shothragot continues to bleed. Each time the essence strikes an opponent with its bite attacks, that creature takes 1 point of Constitution damage in addition to any normal damage taken. If the essence strikes an opponent but does not deal damage, the opponent does not take this Constitution damage. Creatures immune to critical hits (such as plants and constructs) are immune to the Constitution damage dealt by this ability.

Summon Black Cyst (Sp) Automatically summon 1 black cyst; 4/day; caster level 20th. The essence's sign does not affect this ability. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

Anathematic Secrecy (Ex) Any divination spell from a divine origin used to ascertain information about Shothragot fails. This ability is always active.

Force Mastery (Ex) An essence of Shothragot is immune to all spells and spell-like effects with the force descriptor. In addition, it may move through any ongoing force effects (such as *wall of force* and *forcecage*) as if they were not there.

Freedom of Movement (Ex) As the *freedom of movement* spell; always active.

Nondetection (Ex) As the *nondetection* spell; always active.

Seals of Binding (Ex) The seals of binding herald the appearance of Shothragot. See **Signs of the Apocalypse** sidebar for details.

Unholy Blessing (Ex) The essence of Shothragot adds its Charisma modifier as a deflection bonus to Armor Class and as a resistance bonus on all saving throws (included).

Skills The essence of Shothragot gains a +8 racial bonus on Balance, Hide, and Tumble checks.

Hook A susurrus accompanies the essence whenever it moves.

Black Cysts

A great black ball of impenetrable darkness hangs in the air. From the blackness spills a knot of writhing tentacles.

BLACK CYST CR 18
hp 346 (33 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/lawful and silver

Always CE Large outsider (chaos, evil, extraplanar)
Init +7; **Senses** blindsight 120 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +39, Spot +39
Aura warping (60 ft., DC 33)
Languages A black cyst cannot speak but understands telepathic instructions from the essence of Tharizdun

AC 35, touch 17, flat-footed 32; Dodge, Mobility
(-1 size, +3 Dex, +5 insight, +18 natural)
Immune critical hits, massive damage, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, petrification
Resist acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 26
Fort +29, Ref +26, Will +26
Weakness vulnerability to sonic

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares), fly 100 ft. (perfect); Flyby Attack
Melee 8 tentacles +40 (1d6+8/19-20)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +33; **Grp** +45
Atk Options Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*confusion*), aligned strike (chaos, evil), entropic touch, magic strike
Special Actions spawn elemental
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th):
At will -- *confusion* (DC 19), *ethereal jaunt*
1/day -- *insanity* (DC 22), *power word stun*, *waves of exhaustion*

Abilities Str 26, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 3, Wis 17, Cha 21
SA aligned strike (chaos, evil), entropic touch, magic strike, spawn elemental
SQ blessing of Tharizdun
Feats Ability Focus (warping aura), Cleave, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Mobility, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*confusion*)
Skills Hide +43, Listen +39, Move Silently +39, Spot +39
Advancement 34-44 HD (Large), 45-66 (Huge)

Regeneration (Ex) A black cyst takes lethal damage from lawful and silver weapons as well as from effects with the sonic descriptor.

Warping Aura (Su) Each round, at the start of the black cyst's turn, all living creatures within 60 feet must succeed on DC 33 Will saves or take a -5 insight penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks for 1 round. This is a mind-affecting effect.

Entropic Touch (Su) As the *harm* spell, Will DC 31 half, caster level 15th. Once the black cyst uses this ability, it cannot use it again in the same 24-hour period unless it takes 50 or more points of damage.

Spawn Elemental (Su) Whenever a black cyst is reduced to 200 hit points or less, it spews forth an elder elemental into an adjacent square. Roll 1d4 to determine the elemental's type: 1 -- air; 2 -- earth; 3 -- fire; 4 -- water. The spawned elemental is a normal elemental for its kind except its alignment is chaotic evil. The elemental is under the control of the black cyst that spawned it. Should the black cyst's hit point total rise above 200, the elder elemental vanishes.

Blessing of Tharizdun (Ex) A black cyst may add its Charisma bonus as an insight bonus to AC and as a resistance bonus on all saving throws. These bonuses are included.

Skills A black cyst's coloration gives it a +8 bonus on Hide checks.

Hook A wild cackling sounds when a black cyst attacks.

A black cyst is a monstrous creation of Tharizdun, an idiotic servant that exists only to spread the ill-will of the Dark God and destroy all living things.

Strategies and Tactics
A black cyst is aggressive in combat, flying into the thickest group of combatants and exposing them to its warping aura. Once positioned, it uses its first action to deliver its entropic touch to weaken whichever opponent is closest, uncaring or unable to distinguish between the types of foes.

Once it has begun its attack, the black cyst prefers to make full attacks, dividing its tentacle attacks between each opponent it threatens. Depending on the success of its attacks, it may use Power Attack to deal additional damage, but only if it successfully hits its opponents from the start. Through it all, it works to exhaust its quickened *confusion* by casting this spell each round for the first three rounds in the hopes of driving mad all creatures it faces.

The black cyst reserves its attack options and spell-like abilities for when it takes significant damage, usually 50 points or more. It responds first with *waves of exhaustion* followed on the next round with a *power word stun* against the target that dealt it the most damage. Alternatively, if faced with extensive weapon damage, it may train its focus on the attacker using Improved Sunder and *insanity*.

Sample Encounter
A black cyst is a particularly obscure outsider, virtually unknown outside of a few dusty journals penned by occultists and lunatics. Black cysts, when encountered, are always found in conjunction with powerful priests of Tharizdun or one of the mad god's other aspects, namely the Elder Elemental Eye. A cult lucky (or unlucky) enough to have the service of such a monstrosity may very well bind it into an object such as an altar or magic item, while others may mask its appearance with a liberal use of illusion spells. Some even contain them with *walls of force* to keep them in reserve should their temple fall under attack.

The Fane of the Dark God (EL 18): This blasphemous temple is constructed of fitted blocks of obsidian that drink in light brought inside the unholy sanctum. Violet tapestries hang from rails running along the walls near the ceiling, while a great black altar riddled with lavender veins dominates the center of the room. Haunting the border of the Ethereal Plane is a black cyst, watching and waiting for enemies.

Ecology
The black cyst is an entirely unnatural creature -- an abomination conjured up from the madness that defines Tharizdun's mind. Believed to ooze from the Dark God's demiplane prison, black cysts slip free and congregate around the shackled color pool marking the entrance to this place, awaiting the time when their hideous master is freed. Occasionally, black cysts escape the Ethereal Plane to visit horrors on the Material, usually, but not always, on behalf of Tharizdun's mortal servants.

Having no need for sustenance doesn't stop these dim creatures from hunting. Black cysts seem to take special delight from dissolving the flesh of their victims, and when they kill a mortal, they set to work liquefying the victim with their unspeakable essences in a process that can take hours. As the tentacles caress the flesh, the fundamental nature seems to unravel, leaving behind a sticky mess of blood, liquid flesh, and softened bones. Queerly, this act does not actually affect living creatures or creatures animated by negative energy; it only works on the inanimate dead.

Environment: Black cysts are native to the nameless demiplane holding Tharizdun. The divine power that contains the Dark God seems not to affect the black cysts, who can come and go freely if they choose.

Black Cyst Lore
Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the planes) can learn more about a black cyst. When a character makes a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including the information from lower DCs.

KNOWLEDGE (THE PLANES)

DC	Result
28	This creature is a black cyst, a vile horror born from Tharizdun's tortured flesh. This result reveals all outsider traits.
33	Black cysts are particularly resilient creatures, and only weapons of the purest silver and those imbued with the essence of law have even the faintest hopes of injuring it.
38	A black cyst is the embodiment of madness and most of its attacks affect its foes' minds. Between its warping aura that distorts the senses to its various maddening spell-like abilities, to fight these things, an adventurer would do well to shield his mind.
43	Black cysts share their master's elemental eye aspect such that when injured, they spew forth a random elemental to do their bidding, which is usually to ravage its attackers.

Typical Physical Characteristics: A black cyst looks like a massive black ball of darkness. Nothing mars its surface and when light falls upon it, it leaves no reflection. From its depths, it forms long ropy tentacles that flail about when angered. Outside of combat, the tentacles soften and retract, oozing back into the perfect orb of its body.

Society
Black cysts are the nightmares of Tharizdun given form, and, as such, they are capricious beings, capable of unprovoked and appalling acts of violence. They seem to delight in spreading suffering and insanity wherever they go, and some even torment other creatures that bend their knee to the Dark God. Their dim intellect prevents them from forming any sort of lasting community, and their lack of need for sustenance gives them little impetus to set aside their wanton wickedness to work together overlong. This said, black cysts are famous for combining their efforts against greater enemies. It's unlikely they do so out of their own tactical sense. Likely, it is because of some missive from their master.

Alignment: As creatures of Tharizdun's creation, black cysts are always chaotic evil. They recognize no pacts, no alliances, and are as quick to destroy their allies, as they are their enemies.

Typical Treasure
Black cysts have no use for treasure and therefore never keep it. What valuables may be found with a black cyst are undoubtedly the treasures of the cult that summoned it.

Advanced Black Cysts
Black cysts are incapable of growing larger on their own. A servant of Tharizdun can cause the black cyst to swell, however, by performing ritual sacrifice. Every 10 Hit Dice of sacrificed victims causes the black cyst to gain 1 Hit Die. Once it has acquired 44 Hit Dice, it suddenly bloats, expanding with terrifying speed until it finally settles on Huge size.

Black Cysts in Eberron
Black cysts are semi-intelligent formations that cling like cancerous tumors on the edges of Xoriat. From time to time, a few become dislodged during the plane's normal passage only to find themselves caught between realities. Black cysts search for a way to bind themselves to a new reality and so watch for any planar anomalies such as those created by gate spells, and then they slip through to the surprise of the caster.

Black Cysts in Faerûn
Black cysts came to Faerûn with the shades. Native to the Plane of Shadow, these creatures of incomprehensible wickedness and depthless evil seek only to spread madness and despair, to reduce all living things to decay, and slowly pull the Material Plane into the Plane of Shadow. Luckily, the shades brought few of these abominations with them and those that have slipped from their control have been destroyed by doughty heroes, but rumors persist of more and more of these hateful creatures appearing in places beyond Anauroch.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a contract designer for Wizards of the Coast and has contributed to numerous sourcebooks including *Tome of Magic*, *Players Handbook 2*, *Fiendish Codex 2*, *Complete Scoundrel*, *Drow of the Underdark*, *Monster Manual V*, *Exemplars of Evil*, and *Elder Evils*. Robert rarely emerges from his Tennessee office these days, except when dragged away from his keyboard by his incredibly patient wife Stacee and his pride of fiendish werecats.

Grand History of the Realms

The Moonshaes
by Brian R. James
art by Ryan Barger
cartography by Kyle S. Hunter
01/10/2008

Dragon Features Archive
Dragon 362

Cataloging the most prominent events from the Days of Thunder to the impending Spellplague, *The Grand History of the Realms* presents the definitive chronology of the **Forgotten Realms** setting. Some corners of the Realms, however, still hold their secrets from sages and historians. One such place is the enchanted Moonshae Isles, home to the very first novel published in the **Forgotten Realms** setting, *Darkwalker on Moonshae* by Douglas Niles.

Timeline Format

The bulk of this supplement is made up of brief entries that collectively form a timeline of the history of the Moonshaes and other islands of the Sea of Swords. The events are presented (naturally) in chronological order according to the year or time frame in which they occurred.

The Ffolk of the Moonshae mark the ascendancy of Cymrych Hugh to the throne of the High King in the Year of the Student as the start of their calendar. For ease of reference, all dates in this timeline are expressed in the Dalereckoning (DR) notation. To convert between Dalereckoning and Moonshae Reckoning (MR): DR - 200 = MR or MR + 200 = DR.

Monarchies of the Ffolk
Following the chronology, enjoy for the first time a detailed list of the ruling dynasties of the Ffolk from Gwynneth "the First Mother" to High Queen Alicia Kendrick.

History of the Moonshaes

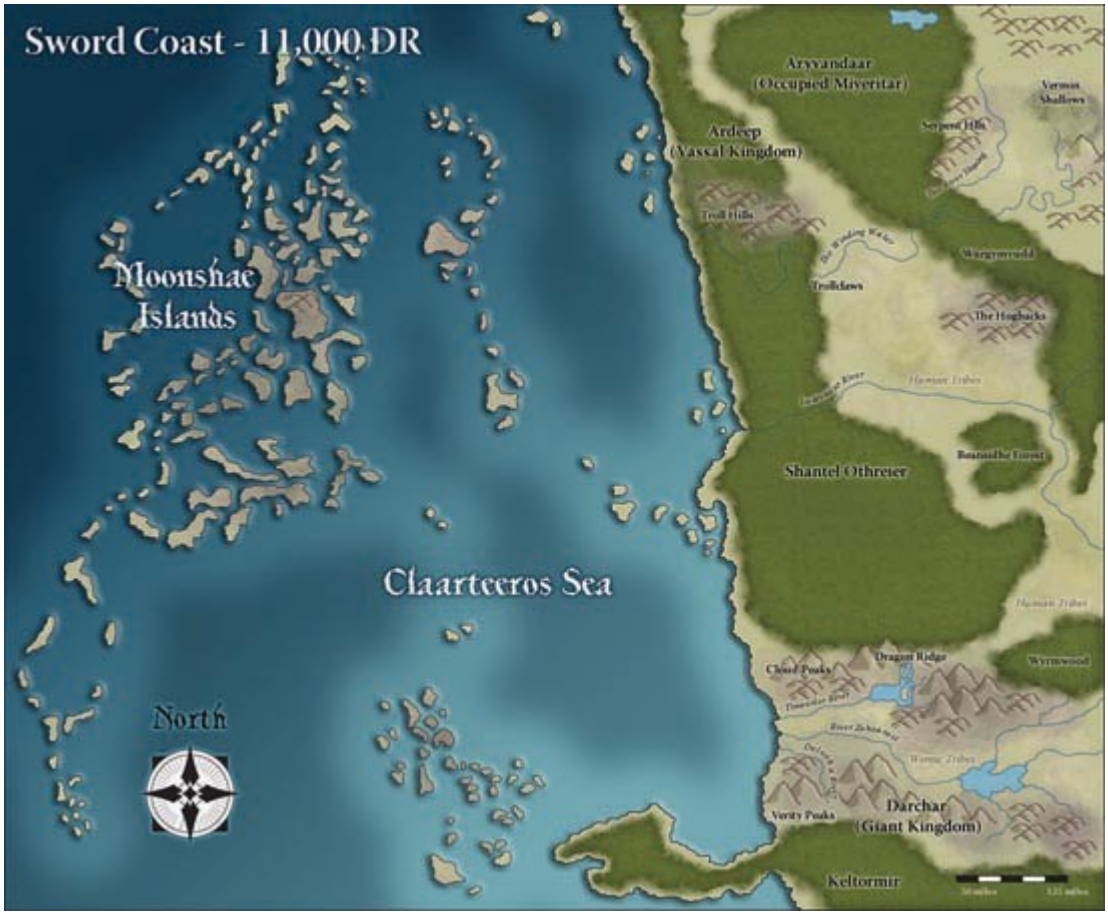
c. -17600 DR
The unchecked energy of the Sundering fractures the supercontinent of Merrouroboros, driving one continental plate westward and forming the Moonshae Islands in its wake. In this age, the Moonshaes consisted of hundreds of little islands, little more than volcanic peaks rising up abruptly out of the turbulent sea.

-- Most undersea inhabitants of Claarteeros (Black Sea) are slain during the Sundering. Ongoing seismic activity following the cataclysm leads to millennia of earthquakes, maelstroms, and other deadly sea hazards, limiting travel and colonization both above and beneath the waves.

c. -15000 DR
Fey take a greater interest in the great archipelago off Faerûn's western shore. Using their mysterious crossroads, thousands of fey begin settling the Moonshae Isles.

c. -11000 DR
-- The mighty fey guardian, Leviathan, arrives to defend the gravely shores and deep firths of the Moonshaes' rugged shorelines.

-- Over the next several centuries the seas calm, the earthquakes subside, and the volcanoes become dormant. It is thought that the leShay or their gods are responsible.



c. -10500 DR
By this time, the Moonshae Islands appear much as they do in the present day, consisting of a few large islands and the Korinn Archipelago.

-- The leShay establish the kingdom of Sarifal; its capitol the shining city of Karador built upon a small island at the center of the shimmering blue waters of Myrloch, a large lake nestled within a great vale on the Moonshae's central island.

c. -10000 DR
The elder unicorn Kamerynn arrives on the Moonshaes, to defend the fields and glens of these great islands.

c. -9800 DR
The IeShay welcome Llewyrr refugees from the mainland, allowing them to settle in isolation and safety among the mountains of the Moonshae Islands. The Llewyrr name their new kingdom Synnoria, after the elf queen who led them to this island sanctuary.

c. -9000 DR
Seeking a counterbalance for the benevolent Leviathan and the wise Kamerynn, the Earthmother summons to the Moonshaes her third child -- the youngest and deadliest of her brood. The Balance demanded that life be countered by death, so the goddess brought forth unto the Moonshaes the Pack, a congregation of savage and bloodthirsty wolves.

c. -8000 DR
Dwarven refugees cut off from Shanatar as a result of the Mindstalker Wars begin exploring remote subterranean passages beneath the Sea of Swords. The dwarves later establish Dwarvenhome in the natural caverns under the Moonshae Islands.

The Moonshaes

The Moonshaes are a cold cluster of rocky islands west of the Sword Coast. Cloaked in mists and deep woods, the islands boast abundant vegetation, wildlife, bogs, and soaring mountains. The coastlines are sharp and rugged, and harsh storms sweep the islands during the cold months.

In previous years the isles' two dominate human ethnicities, the Northlanders or "Northmen" and the Ffolk, spent much of their time at each other's throats, particularly because of the Northlanders' penchant for bloody raiding. In the Year of the Bright Blade (1347 DR), High King Tristan Kendrick brought Ffolk and Northmen together to sign the Treaty of Oman, which ushered in more than twenty years of uneasy peace. Then in the Year of the Unstrung Harp (1371 DR), both groups agreed to permanently put aside long held animosities and come together as a united people. Today Ffolk and Northlander alike swear fealty to High Queen Alicia Kendrick, who rules from her court at Caer Callidyrr on the eastern island of Alaron.

The southern islands of the Moonshaes remain predominately settled by the Ffolk, dark-haired, fair-skinned farmers and fisherfolk who were the original human inhabitants of the islands. The northern isles remain dominated by the seafaring Northlanders, fair-skinned, light-haired warriors who trace their ancestry from the raiders of Ruathym and ancient Illusk. Northmen still feel that it is far more honorable to live a life of adventure on the seas than to farm and herd animals as the Ffolk do. The Northlanders haven't completely abandoned their life of pillaging either, though they now focus their aggression against the smaller isles of the Trackless Sea or the reaver-held lands of the Nelanther. All Moonshavians speak Illuskan and the few literate employ the Thorass script introduced by Tethyrian immigrants. The Moonshae's small circle of druids speak the original language of the Ffolk -- Waelan, an ancient Talfric tongue based on the Draconic alphabet.

Traditionally Moonshavians have not welcomed outlanders from the mainland. Since her rise to power in the Year of the Sword (1365 DR), the high queen has sought to break the custom of isolationism long practiced by her people.

Humans are not the only inhabitants among the isles. Gwynneth, the largest and most central of the Moonshae's many islands, contains a large region still inhabited by the lands' original residents. The huge valley of bogs, forests, and wild scrubland has been known for millennia as Myrloch Vale, named after the large, cold lake at its center. Today the vale forms the center of the fey kingdom of Sarifal, returned to the Moonshaes in the Year of Risen Elfkin (1375 DR). It's hard to dismiss the enchanted nature of the place. Here dwell many varieties of fey, enchanted beasts, sentient vegetation, and of course the reclusive Llewyrrr elves in their mountain home of Synnoria.

c. -7000 DR
Dwarven settlers establish Highhome in the Cambro Mountains east of Myrloch Vale.

c. -6000 DR
Grond Peaksmasher leads a tribe of giants to the Moonshae Isles, primarily settling on the island of Norland in the Jotunhammer Mountains. The dwarves name the giant tribe "Fir-Bolg," or large men with spears.

c. -5000 DR
In a great conflict between the dwarves and firbolgs of the Moonshaes, Grond Peaksmasher is imprisoned on Oman's Isle beneath the great Ice Peak. Without Grond's guidance, the firbolgs degenerate into brutes no more civilized than hill giants.

c. -4600 DR
The stone fortress of Sonnmorndin is built as a naval base by the Sailors of the Mountainous Waves, the dwarven marines of Haunghdannar, on the island of Arauwurbarak (present-day Ruathym).

c. -4000 DR
Imaskari artificers are common visitors to the Royal Court of Sarifal. It is thought that the IeShay establish an alliance with the human empire during this time.

c. -3100 DR
Human seafarers from the west, known today as the Illuskan or Northmen, name and settle the island of Ruathym.

c. -3000 DR
Human warriors of Ruathym found the settlement of Illusk at the mouth of the River Mirar and displace local Ice Hunter tribes.

c. -2000 DR
Malar unleashes "The Beast" to stalk the Moonshae Islands. The Llewyrr united with the dwarves and the children of the Earthmother to confront the Beast. From the darkest depths of Feywild, the Beast summons forth mighty fomorians to fight against his enemies. For

many decades, war wracks the isles, but finally the Beast's evil minions are driven into small corners of the isles, where they were carefully watched by the protectors of the Balance.

-- The fomorians, an evil race of giant-sized fey, easily overpower the native firbolg tribes, taking them as slaves. After a few generations of forced breeding, Moonshae firbolgs assume some of the disfigurements commonly associated with fomorians.

c. -1000 DR
For the next several centuries, the Illuskans of Ruathym colonize the Gull Rocks, Gundarlun, Mintarn, the Purple Rocks, the Teeth, Tuern (a.k.a., Uttersea), Umukek, the Wave Rocks, and the Whalebones. In time these Illuskan seafarers become known as the Northmen. Thinking them cursed, the Northmen stay clear of the Moonshae Isles and its mischievous fey inhabitants.

c. -500 DR
Most Fey, including the haughty leShay and the malevolent fomorians, inexplicably retreat to Feywild, abandoning the kingdom of Sarifal and their claim to the Moonshae Isles. The ancient city of Karador sinks beneath the waves of Myrloch, forgotten but not wholly abandoned.

-334 DR (Year of the Three Seas' Rage)
A group of Netherese arcanists establish the city Helbrester in the Nelanther Isles.

-105 DR (Year of the Bloody Goad)
An Illuskan tribe known as the Rus, led by their chieftain Yvengi, stumble upon a malfunctioning portal in the Whalebones. It deposited them on the eastern shore of Lake Ashane in far away Rashemen.

-54 DR (Year of Tomes)
Pirates settle the Nelanther at this time and begin stealing ships and start major disruptions of the burgeoning sea trade off Tethyr. The pirates are led by Black Alaric the Pirate, the exiled cousin of Chief Darius Fyrson of Clan Fyrson.

-- The pirates under Black Alaric attempt to seize Helbrester but are driven off. The Sunset Towers area becomes a neutral meeting ground for pirates and merchants alike.

-44 DR (Year of the Giant's Rage)
King Nishan II of Tethyr launches a major offensive against the pirates that culminates in the Channel Battle, which sees the sinking of the royal flagship and the death of its commander, the scuttling of the pirate flagship, and the believed death of Black Alaric the Pirate.

-9 DR (Year of Fell Traitors)
Clan Fyrson of Tethyr voluntarily goes outlaw and joins the Nelanther pirates after the murder of clan chief Tavis II by his brother Volsun. Volsun assumes the mantle of Black Alaric, started by his late paternal uncle.

95 DR (Year of the Reluctant Hero)
The Ruathym warlord Uthgar Gardolfsson leads a reaver fleet against the port of Illusk and sacks the city. The roused citizens of Illusk o succeed in burning the raiders' ships, and the weakened reavers are eventually driven from the city by enraged citizen mobs.

127 DR (Year of the Defiant Stone)
Grath Erlkar, a Northmen raider and explorer, founds Grath's Hold (later known as Port Llast).

140 DR (Year of the Executioner)
Fleeing persecution under the Shadowking of Ebenfar, tribes of lost Talfir cross the Sea of Swords and settle along the southern shores of the island they name Gwynneth.

144 DR (Year of the Fear and Flame)
Human settlers of Gwynneth come into conflict with the Llewyrr. The chieftain Taylor, consort of Gwynneth "the First Mother," dies in combat with the elves.

149 DR (Year of the Dwarf)
Victorious in battle, Deric of the Ffolk unites the cantrevs of southern Gwynneth into the fledgling kingdom of Corwell.

151 DR (Year of the Kraken)
Birth of Slarkrethel, future leader of the Kraken Society and seraph of Umberlee, in the depths of the Trackless Sea.

154 DR (Year of the Jealous Hag)
King Kaminas of Synnoria and King Deric of Corwell establish peace between their two peoples at the elven capital of Chysalis.

177 DR (Year of the Troublesome Vixen)
Following years of civil war, Callidyrr Hugh, a son of Ebenfar nobility, unites the warring kingdoms of Corwell.

201 DR (Year of the Student)
Bhaal, assumes control of Kazgoroth and sends "the Beast" against the Ffolk of the Moonshaes. The legendary warrior chieftain Cymrych Hugh defeats Kazgoroth and is crowned High King of the Moonshae Isles.

-- Later the same year Queen Allisynn succumbs to wounds suffered during the war against Kazgoroth. Cymrych Hugh commissions the construction of a palace to house his wife's body and fills it with vast treasures. Druids then send Caer Allisynn to a watery grave beneath the Strait of Alaron.

-- Year 1 of the Moonshae Reckoning (MR) calendar.

244 DR (Year of the Elfsands)
The kraken Slarkrethel discovers the ruins of the ancient elven city of Ascarle in the Trackless Sea and begins formation of the Kraken Society.

250 DR (Year of the Storm Crown)
Upon his death, High King Cymrych Hugh is entombed beneath a barrow mound in the foothills north of Blackstone. With no strong heir to the throne, the kingdoms of Moonshae split among the islands.

256 DR (Year of the Thousand Snows)
Illuskan sailors from the island nations of Tuern and Gundarlun make landfall on the Moonshae Islands, finding a collection of squabbling kingdoms. Over the next couple centuries, Ffolk settlements throughout the Moonshaes suffer seasonal attacks from the barbaric Northmen.

289 DR (Year of the Walking Dreams)
High King Gwylloch has the skulls of his enemies fashioned into the Castle of Skulls. The High King then moves his court to the mighty palace hidden in the depths of Llyrath Forest. Gwylloch leads expeditions against the lands of the Northmen over the next several years. Captives were taken to High King's palace where they were slain in a grim arena called the Circus Bizarre.

295 DR (Year of the Wrathful Revenant)
Prince Ketheryll, son of High King Gwylloch, captures King Durnhal and Queen Morgan of Corwell and puts them to death for treason against the High King.

299 DR (Year of the Vaasan Knot)
High King Gwylloch, Prince Ketheryll, and all of their retainers slowly go mad. On the evening of the summer solstice, the inhabitants of the Castle of Skulls slaughter each other in a suicidal orgy of combat within the castle's gruesome walls. It is suspected that the mage Flamsterd was somehow involved in the High King's downfall.

310 DR (Year of the Amber Hulk)
The halfling community of Marrduin on the island of Orlumbor is decimated by a six-legged horror from the Lower Planes named Gorathil.

370 DR (Year of Sleeping Dangers)
Calimshan's Great Colony Fleet sets sail to colonize the Moonshaes. An unseasonable storm blows over the Calishite vessels, sinking half the fleet within the first hour and driving the remaining vessels hundreds of leagues into the Trackless Sea. Survivors, clinging to the few ships that remain afloat, drift upon the currents of the Trackless Sea for twenty days and nights. Of the six hundred that set sail from Calimport, only a score survive to reach landfall on the shores of distant Lopango.

467 DR (Year of Four Winds)
A large migrant group of Tethyrians immigrate to the Moonshae Isles and settle among the Ffolk. The outlanders bring with them the faiths of the mainland, but most Ffolk continue to worship the Earthmother exclusively. Among the settlers are architects and engineers who teach the Ffolk how to build strong defensive fortifications such as city walls and stone keeps. Northmen incursions drop off precipitously over the next several centuries.

562 DR (Year of the Waking Feyr)
Anhaern Rhyllgallohyr, Captain of the Sisters of Synnoria, loses her life while investigating a disturbance in the Fens of the Fallen. Restored to life by some fell magic, Anhaern is seen a tenday later galloping across Myrloch Vale on her ghostly steed. Ffolk skalds name her the Shee, or "Banshee Rider."

621 DR (Year of Nineteen Swords)
Princess Bridget of Callidyrr and her royal entourage disappear en route to Norland, where she was to be wed to Prince Scothgar of Rogarsheim. Both sides blame each other for the Princess' disappearance, further straining relations between the two peoples.

-- Settlers from the Moonshae Isles colonize the lands of the Utter East and subjugate the indigenous Mar tribes.

745 DR (Year of the Proud Menhir)
Fire Giants sailing from Tuern on gargantuan longships sack the coastal town of Gundbarg. This is the first of many giant raids against Gundarlun that continue to the present day.

852 DR (Year of the False Smile)
A massive fleet of Illuskan longships from the Sword Coast arrive in the Moonshae Islands, ready for conquest. High King Dolan Cymrych is drowned when his coracle flotilla is destroyed crossing Whitefish Bay in a futile attempt to turn back the Northmen fleet. The *Crown of the High King* is lost to the watery depths. Dolan's son Conn assumes the High Throne, but the loss of the crown becomes a severe blow to his position.

887 DR (Year of Fell Pearls)
Pirates from the South raid Nimoar's Hold in force but all attacks against the fledgling city fail.

944 DR (Year of the Animated Armor)
The Ffolk of the Moonshaes concede the northern isles of the Moonshaes to "Northmen" settlers.

-- High King Tanner Cymrych leads his men into Myrloch Vale to quell a giant incursion. Ambushed, the High King loses his life though the Ffolk win the day. The *Sword of Cymrych Hugh* is lost, apparently carried away by giant survivors.

964 DR (Year of the Pickled Privateer)
Belshareen, a maiden of the Ffolk, marries Ridinlahr, a lord of the Llewyrr. Lord Ridinlahr crafts a magic harp for his new bride, which in time will become known as the *Lost Harp of Belshareen*.

1052 DR (Year of the Frozen Kingdoms)
High King Bayle Carrathal of the Moonshaes seeks to annex the islands of Jannath's Tears into his kingdom. Baldur's Gate comes to the defense of the Tears, sinking Carrathal's small fleet.

1107 DR (Year of the Skulk)
The sage and historian Bhaernom Khreyt of Baldur's Gate, possessor of the *Tome of the Unicorn*, loses the book when the ship carrying it to the Moonshae Isles sinks with the loss of all hands.

1126 DR (Year of Azure Blood)
The royal family of Ruathym obtains the fabled *Tome of the Unicorn* and places this treasure in the Green Rooms on that island.

1128 DR (Year of the Peryton)
The ancient red wyrm Gotha is deceived by Talos and led to his demise trapped within the cold earth of the icy north. Instead of death, the corrupting influence of Talos transforms Gotha into a dracolich and for centuries he lay there frozen and crushed beneath the mountain waiting for Talos to free him.

1148 DR (Year of the Angry Sea)
The first surface-dwelling agents of the Kraken Society begin to operate in the coastal lands of the North.

1228 DR (Year of the Tattered Banners)
The many small islands of the Korinn Archipelago are tamed by a Northmen chieftain named Viledel "the Sea King."

1291 DR (Year of the Hooded Falcon)
Flamsterd tower explodes in a great cacophony, dropping it and half the island of the same name into the sea. There is no word of Flamsterd or his apprentices.

1326 DR (Year of the Striking Hawk)
Prince Tristan, son of King Bryon Kendrick of Corwell, is born.

1329 DR (Year of the Lost Helm)
The Calishite mining and refining colony of Berranzo is founded on Gundarlun by a consortium of merchants led by the wizard Hochmiraz.

1330 DR (Year of the Marching Moon)
Brianna Moonsinger, Great Druid of the Moonshaes, is slain while trying to prevent the return of Kazgaroth. Her sister Genna takes up the mantle of Great Druid.

-- Queen Addee of Corwell dies; succumbing to an illness sustained in childbirth with Tristan. King Bryon Kendrick spends the next ten years in mourning.

1335 DR (Year of the Snow Winds)
King Dagdar of Moray leads an assault against the Northmen village of Trondhelm and is slain. His son Dynnegall is later crowned king.

1336 DR (Year of the Blazing Brand)
Elminster "the Sage" visits the Moonshae Isles.

1341 DR (Year of the Gate)
Following the death of Sigurd Helmudson "the Wise," Rolf Olafsson is named King of Gnarhelm, uniting the disparate realms of Olafstaad, Gnarhelm, and Sunderstaad under a single banner.

1345 DR (Year of the Saddle)
Darkwalker War: Agents of the god Bhaal corrupt one of the Earthmother's moonwells. From this darkwell, Kazgaroth "the Beast" attempts to destroy the Earthmother and ruin the Moonshaes. Kazgaroth, disguised in the human form of Thelgaar Ironhand, leads an invasion of Caer Corwell. In the end, Kazgoroth flees to the corrupted moonwell and is slain by Tristan and his companions.

-- King Pwylloch of Snowdown is assassinated.

1346 DR (Year of the Bloodbird)
King Dynnegall of Moray and King Bryon Kendrick of Corwell are assassinated.

-- Prince Tristan and allies later defeat the murderous wizards and depose High King Carrathal, who had become a puppet of evil in service to Bhaal. Tristan Kendrick is then anointed High King of the Moonshaes by the Earthmother herself.

-- The sinister god Bhaal seeks to use a corrupted moonwell to send a manifestation known as "the Ravager" to the Moonshaes. It was during this time that the goddess Chauntea noticed the crippled and faltering status of the Earthmother and began to counter Bhaal's schemes for the Isles. Embracing the goddess Chauntea, the Great Druid Robyn Moonsinger uses her new powers to drive Bhaal's avatar back through the darkwell. King Tristan used the *Sword of Cymrych Hugh* to seal the *gate*, severing Bhaal's link to the Moonshaes.

-- High King Tristan Kendrick and Queen Robyn are married that winter in Caer Callidyrr. Within two years, the royal couple welcome into the world two beautiful heirs, the girls Alicia and Deirdre.

1347 DR (Year of the Bright Blade)
Treaty of Oman: Witnessed by King Rolf Olafsson of Gnarhelm and Grunnarch the Red of Norland under the looming spire of Icepeak, the Northmen tribes of the Moonshaes sign a peace treaty with High King Tristan Kendrick of the Ffolk.

1348 DR (Year of the Spur)
King Rolf Olafsson dies of natural causes leaving the Northmen realm of Gnarhelm to his son Svenyird.

1353 DR (Year of the Arch)
Lord Dagus of Olafstaad sets sail with sixty warriors to pillage the Nelanther Isles. Their season of successful raiding turns grim when they are confronted by bloodthirsty reavers southeast of Nindrol. Seeking a tactical advantage over the inhuman pirates, Dagus leads his longships through the deadly whirlpools of Oboron's Maw. His crew's superior seamanship wins the day, but the Northmen suffer many casualties. Lord Dagus himself is grievously wounded, losing his left arm below the elbow.

1356 DR (Year of the Worm)
Ruathym-Luskan War: Ruathym attacks and sinks a Luskanite caravel after persons unknown (at the time) stole the Tome of the Unicorn from the Green Library. Luskan responds by destroying much of Ruathym's fleet and invades the island itself. After months of fighting, Ruathym's defenders drive the High Captains of Luskan back to their ships.

1357 DR (Year of the Prince)
Waterdeep negotiates a truce between Ruathym and Luskan, but that backfires when Luskan, Ruathym, Tuern, and the Whalebones forge an alliance to raid settlements along the Sword Coast.

-- The Chansreena (Princess) Alabhansree Alanasker disappears from Ormpur along with a large quantity of saffron and many magical blades, traveling with her lover, the pirate Cairak Redbeard, to the Moonshaes.

1358 DR (Year of Shadows)
The Lords' Alliance expels Luskan's forces from Ruathym by applying combined diplomatic and military pressure. Luskan and the allied island realms of the Trackless Sea join to form the Captain's Confederation.

-- Appearing also in the Trackless Sea, Umberlee "the Bitch Queen" adopts the kraken Slarkrethel as her seraph.

1359 DR (Year of the Serpent)
Led by Gauntather "the Dark Druid," priests of the Risen Cult of Bane arrive in the Moonshaes to spread fear among the Ffolk and fight against local druids with hired brigands and undead. Employing a little used *portal* known as the Cloven Stone, the Cult secretly infiltrates Caer Callidyrr seeking to abduct High King Tristan Kendrick from his throne room. Adventurers with support from the Harpers and the archmage Flamsterd prevent the abduction, but not before confronting and driving off an avatar of Iyachtu Xvim, "the Godson."

1360 DR (Year of the Helm)
Talos "the Destroyer" sends an onslaught of storm, drought, blizzard, and hurricanes upon the Moonshaes over the next five years.

-- Akbet-Khrul, the self-named Grand Vizier of the Pirate Isles, leads two dozen galleys filled with bloodthirsty pirates against Captain-General Cordell and a much smaller force of mercenaries hired by desperate merchants from Amn. Superior tactics and the favor of Helm "the Vigilant One" win the day for Cordell and his Golden Legion. Akbet-Khrul's pirates are routed, leaving the passage through Asavir's Channel safe for merchant traffic over the next several years.

1361 DR (Year of Maidens)
The plotting of the Kraken Society sees Ruathym pitted against the sea elves of the surrounding region and Luskan. Waterdeep, along with the rest of the Lords' Alliance, is forced to threaten war when Luskan once again conquers Ruathym to the west. The Society's plot is foiled by Liriel Baenre and her companion Fyodor.

1365 DR (Year of the Sword)
Robyn Kendrick, High Queen of the Moonshaes, once again feels the Earthmother's touch, marking the goddess's return to the Moonshae Isles. Displeased with the apparent rebirth of an ancient foe, the vengeful Talos seeks to turn the Northmen and the Ffolk against one another. To assist in his evil agenda, Talos recruits murderous pirates, sahuagin from the deep realm of Kressilacc, and the dracolich Gotha to his cause.

-- High King Tristan Kendrick sails for Amn to secure great quantities of grain to feed his growing population. On the return trip his galleon is scuttled by bad weather with all hands lost to the sea. It is later revealed that the High King was captured by sea troll king Krell-Bane and taken to the undersea city of Kyrasti. Emissaries of Krell-Bane later deliver a grizzly trophy to High Queen Robyn, her husband's left hand.

-- While the High King is away, greed and lust for power drives Angus Blackstone, Earl of Fairheight, to betray the throne in exchange for favors from a dark agent of Talos. His deceit is later revealed and Earl Blackstone pays for his treachery with his life. His son, Hanrold is named the new Earl of Fairheight.

-- Malar unleashes Ityak-Ortheel "the Elf Eater" to rampage across Myrloch Vale and assault the elven realm of Synnoria. Ityak-Ortheel destroys the *portal* Fey-Alamtine and the Llewyrr capital city of Chrysalis, including Argen-Tellirynd, the timeless Palace of Ages. The halfling hero Pawldo of Lowhill is slain before Ityak-Ortheel is banished back to the Abyss.

-- Thurgol, firbolg chieftain of Blackleaf, leads his tribe into the lands east of Codsrun Creek where they sack the dwarven settlement of Cambro and retrieve the legendary *Silverhaft Axe*. Trolls join the firbolg ranks as the army marches north toward the Strait of Oman and the doomed village of Codscove.

-- Parell Hyath, Exalted Inquisitor of Helm, arrives in the Moonshaes riding a *Chariot of Sustarre*. After failing to regenerate the High King's hand, the Inquisitor convinces Tristan to undertake a holy quest in the wilds of Myrloch Vale.

-- Princess Dierdre Kendrick, corrupted by Talos, assists firbolgs in releasing the avatar of Grond Peaksmasher from his imprisonment atop the frozen trails of Ice Peak on Oman's Isle. The Princess is later slain by her sister Alicia.

-- Queen Robyn later retires to Myrloch Vale to commune with the Earthmother. Tristan Kendrick abdicates his throne to be with his wife and their daughter Alicia Kendrick is crowned High Queen of the Moonshaes.

1366 DR (Year of the Staff)
The wizard Keane is crowned High King upon his marriage to High Queen Alicia Kendrick of the Moonshae Isles.

-- Prince Brandon Olafsson is named king of Gnarhelm following his father's death by illness.

-- With the revitalization of the Moonshae's many *moonwells*, faithful of the Earthmother begin to pilgrimage to druid groves in great numbers.

1367 DR (Year of the Shield)
In the Sacred Grove of the Great Druid on the shores of Myrloch, the Robyn Kendrick encounters an old friend, Yazilliclik the wood sprite. Yazilliclik warns the Great Druid that "Sarifal is awakening" before disappearing.

1368 DR (Year of the Gauntlet)
The kraken Slarkrethel destroys and sinks the Harper-charted *Maiden's Defiance* near the ruins of Ascarle.

-- Druid grove wardens throughout Myrloch Vale mysteriously disappear after being called to enter the sacred waters of the moonwells. Distracted by the faerie dragon Newt, the Great Druid Robyn Kendrick does not succumb to the same fate.

1369 DR (Year of the Gauntlet)
Deepwater War: Sahuagin raiders, led by the enigmatic wereshark Iakhovas, attack port cities of the Sword Coast throughout the year leaving harbors in ruin and fleets shattered. Sea trade throughout the Sea of Swords drops precipitously in the wake of the conflict.

-- The Bozeman Line, a merchant coster operating out of Callidyr, sets aflame its own vessel, the *Green Hag*, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the notorious pirate Black Alaric of the Nelanther.

-- Pilgrimages to the druid groves diminish as Ffolk continue to go missing at the moonwells. Against the High Queen's advice, Robyn and Tristan Kendrick harness the power of the Great Moonwell of Myrloch Vale and enter the otherworldly realm of Feywild in search of the missing druids.

1370 DR (Year of the Tankard)
In a decisive sea victory over the reavers of the Nelanther, the Royal Navy of the Moonshaes, lead by flagship *Callidyrr Hugh*, sinks nearly twenty enemy vessels in the waters of Firedrake Bay. The Royal Navy loses only six vessels in the confrontation.

-- Many species of fey, largely benevolent though occasionally mischievous, begin immigrating through the moonwells. The faeries confine themselves primarily to the lands of Myrloch Vale and Winterglen Forest.

1371 DR (Year of the Unstrung Harp)
United Moonshae Isles: At King Olafsson's urging, Northmen kings throughout the Sea of Moonshae swear fealty to the new High Queen. For the first time in their stormy history, both Northmen and Ffolk are united under a single banner. With grand ceremony High Queen Alicia Kendrick signs a proclamation marking the birth of the United Moonshae Isles. The Northmen kings adopt the title of Jarl and continue to rule the traditional lands of their people.

-- In the waning days of Kythorn a shimmerling swarm descends on the remote Northmen village of Grimstad along the northern frontier of Winterglen. Following the attack, the residents abandoned the site and by year's end the entire village is subsumed by the ever-expanding Forest.

1372 DR (Year of Wild Magic)
Exotic species of half-fey are seen throughout the isles. Violent encounters with fey continue to increase as Ffolk and Northmen are driven from settlements along the circumference of Myrloch Vale. High Queen Alicia sends men to investigate the increasing fey threat to her kingdom. They are either turned away or disappear completely. Hunters report that a charismatic verdant prince has been organizing the fey and sentient plants of Oakvale on Myrloch's southwestern shore.

1373 DR (Year of the Rogue Dragons)
The ancient red dragon Hoondarrh, "the Red Rage of Mintarn," vents his fury on the city of Callidyrr, setting much of the city ablaze. The Great Druid, Robyn Kendrick, emerges from Feywild with a circle of powerful druids. She quickly teleports to Callidyrr with her entourage and drives away the Red Rage.

-- High King Keane later succumbs to grievous wounds suffered while defending the city. Attempts to resurrect the High King are fruitless.

1374 DR (Year of Lightning Storms)
As they were millennia past, the firbolgs of the Grampalt Highlands are subjugated by fomorians and sent into battle against the settlements of Oman's Isle. By Midsummer Iron Keep, all of Oman's Isle falls to the evil fomorians and their firbolg thralls.

1375 DR (Year of Risen Elfkin)
The ancient leShay capital of Karador rises from the crystal clear waters of Myrloch. The fey queen Ordalf announces the rebirth of the Sarifal and declares herself High Lady over all the lands of Gwynneth.

Monarchies of the Ffolk

For much of its history, the Ffolk of the Moonshaes have not been united under a High King.

Reading the Lists: In the following tables, the name of a monarch is not preceded by King or Queen (the gender of each individual is apparent from the notes). Those who ruled the collective lands of the Ffolk as High King or High Queen have their named preceded by "HK" or "HQ." Those who served as regents are denoted by [R], with the years of their reigns likewise in brackets. The year of a monarch's death is the same as the end of his or her reign unless otherwise noted.

The Legacy of Cymrych Hugh: The war with Kazgaroth in the Year of the Student (201 DR) resulted in the death of most of the ruling families of the Ffolk. Surviving nobles married their daughters to the children and grandchildren of Cymrych Hugh to establish a connection to the royal bloodline. Within a few short generations, every ruling family in the Moonshaes adopted the surname Cymrych.

With High King Tanner's death and the loss of the *Sword of Cymrych Hugh* in the Year of the Animated Armor (944 DR), the noble families begin to distance themselves from the legendary (or imaginary some would say) Cymrych Hugh. Each family took to spelling and pronouncing their particular names differently. Thus, the bloodline of Cymrych diverged into the royal lines of Carrathal, Kendrick, Selkirk, Cambridge, Kimball, Cyric, Riker, and Kincaid.

	Born	Reigned	Notes
The First Dynasty			
Gwynneth "the First Mother"	109	140/141	Second daughter of Archduke Markus Randol of Ebenfar; led refugees across the Sea of Swords establishing first human settlement on the Moonshae Islands; died of consumption.
Taylor	115	141/144	Consort of Gwynneth; died in combat against Llewyrr.
Deric	130	149/171	Son of Taylor and Gwynneth; died of natural causes without an heir; civil war ensues.
Hugh Dynasty of Corwell			
Callidyrr	161	177/193	Son of Ebenfar nobility; united the kingdom of Corwell following civil war; slain by trolls.
HK Cymrych	171	193/250*	First son of Callidyrr; died of wounds suffered years earlier in combat against Kazgoroth.
Christopher Riker [R]	174	[201/250]	Champion of Cymrych Hugh; named regent of Corwell in 201; died in 256.
Cedric Riker [R]	198	[250/272]	Son of Reagent Christopher Koart.
Cymrych Dynasty of Callidyrr			
HK Warren I	237	250/259	First son of Cymrych Hugh; died of illness.
HQ Tamara	238	259/263	First daughter of Cymrych High; poisoned
HK Carrig I	244	263/287	Second son of Cymrych Hugh; died in combat against Northmen invaders.
HK Gwylloch	265	287/299	First son of Carrig I; driven mad and died in suicidal orgy of combat within his court at the Palace of Skulls.
HK Gorham	270	299/322	Second son of Carrig I; slain by Markus.
HK Markus	288	322/333	Second son of Gwylloch; died in combat.
HK Cameron "the Wise"	291	333/370	Grandson of Warren I; died of natural causes.
HK Bran	319	370/378	Second son of Cameron; died of illness.
HK Conall	340	378/389	First son of Bran; accidental death by crossbow.
HK Lann	358	389/420	First son of Conall; drowned when ship went down off the coast of Snowdown.
HK Carrig II	378	420/431	First son of Lann; died of plague.
HK Kemble "the Great Father"	400	431/482	First son of Carrig II; welcomed Tethyrian immigrants to the Moonshaes in 467 DR; died of natural causes.
HK Tristram	423	482/483	First son of Kemble; died of illness.
HK Tuathal	444	483/499	First son of Tristram; assassinated.

HK Carrig III	470	499/500	Son of Tuathal; assassinated.
Edmund Kincaid [R]	469	[500/507]	King of Snowdown named regent by Queen Abigail, wife of Carrig III.
HK Colin	491	507/549	Son of Carrig III; famed for clearing Torriage Wood of werewolves; slain by son Gordon when Colin himself contracted lycanthropy.
HK Gordon	514	549/569	First son of Colin; died of illness.
HQ Miranda "the Fair"	543	569/609	Daughter of Gordon; died of natural causes.
HK Embro I	559	609/614	First son of Miranda; died from injuries suffered in horse-riding accident.
HK Embro II	577	614/632	Son of Embro I; established temporary peace with Northmen; died in battle against King Stromm of Norland.
HK Alec I	597	632/640	First son of Embro II; mauled by bear while on a hunt.
HK Rowland "the Boy King"	626	640/642	Son of Alec; died of illness.
HK Samuel	601	642/651	Second son of Embro II; died of heartstop.
HK Warren II	618	651/674	First son of Samuel; died of natural causes.
HK Tobert	640	674/679	First son of Warren II; died in combat against firbolgs.
HK Ernest	664	679/731	First son of Tobert; died of natural causes.
HK Carthus	684	731	First son of Ernest; abdicates the throne to his brother Alec; died of natural causes in Tethyr in 745 DR.
HK Alec II	685	731/738	Second son of Ernest; died of plague.
HK Pendar	708	738/749	Son of Alec II; slain by wolves.
HK Declan	725	749/762	First son of Pendar; poisoned by son Ciaran.
HK Ciaran	744	762/773	Son of Declan; slain by angry mob during Festival of the Spring Equinox.
HK Ardan	748	773/796	Nephew of Declan; died of natural causes.
HK Byron I	770	796/826	Son of Ardan; died of natural causes.
HK Kevan	789	826/850	First son of Byron I; died of natural causes; Kevan ruled briefly in 818 and 819 when High King Byron I fell into magical slumber.
HK Dolan	821	850/852	Second son of Kevan; died in sea battle against Northmen invaders.
HK Conn	837	852/885	First son of Dolan; died in combat against Northmen invaders.
HK Byron II	855	885/902	First son of Conn; died of illness; original name Merrick.
HK Tanner*	879	902/944	Second son of Byron II; died in combat against firbolg chieftain.

*High King Tanner's death ends the Cymrych Dynasty of Callidyrr and the rule of the High Kings. His son Niall changes the family name to Carrathal and assumes the rule over the realm of Callidyrr only.

Carrathal Dynasty of Callidyrr

Niall	901	944/954	Son of Tanner Cymrych; died of illness.
Erfle "the Venerable One"	921	954/1012	First son of Niall; died of natural causes.
Alec III	982	1012/1030	Grandson of Erfle; died in a fire.
Bayle	1005	1030/1052	Son and sole heir of Alec III; deposed following a failed attempt to annex the small island chain of Jannath's Tears.
Yolanda	1029	1052/1089	Grandniece of Alec III; died of illness.

Bertrand	1026	1089/1095	Husband of Yolanda; died of natural causes.
Edwin I	1055	1095/1127	Third son of Yolanda and Bertrand; died of natural causes.
Bethany	1084	1127/1133	First daughter of Edwin I; died of illness.
Edwin II	1103	1133/1135	First son of Bethany; died while touring iron mine near Cantrev Whiterock.
Adom Kimball [R]	1096	[1135/1141]	King of Moray named regent by Queen Eleanor, wife of Edwin II.
Adrian "the Twinblade"	1125	1141/1207	Son and sole heir of Edwin II; died of natural causes.
Cedric	1176	1207/1243	Grandson of Adrian; died of natural causes.
Vance	1193	1243/1266	First son of Cedric; died of natural causes.
Teldin	1216	1266/1271	Son of Vance; died of heartstop.
Rieger	1238	1271/1273	Second son of Teldin; mysteriously disappeared in 1273; date of death unknown.
Benjamin	1257	1273/1296	First son of Rieger; assassinated by nobles from Cantrev Ogden.
Alec IV	1274	1296/1332	First son of Benjamin; died of natural causes.
Reginald	1312	1332/1346	Third son of Alec IV; murdered by the traitorous black wizard Cyndre.
Brynth*	1334	--	Bastard son of Reginald; raised in Amn with his birthmother; slain by wererats in 1371.
Lionel*	1355	--	Grandson of Reginald; son of Brynth.

*Did not rule; marked for line of succession.

Kendrick Dynasty of Callidyrr			
HK Tristan	1328	1346/1365	First son of King Bryon of Corwell; abdicated throne to his daughter Alicia.
HQ Alicia	1346	1365/--	First daughter of Tristan; first monarch to unite the Ffolk and the Northmen tribes together under a single banner.

About the Author

A software engineer by day and **Forgotten Realms** aficionado by night, **Brian R. James** is the author of the recently released *Grand History of the Realms*. Brian lives in Montana with his high school sweetheart Toni and their four children, Jesse, Cameron, Eleanor, and Bridget. In his spare time he enjoys playing a shadowknight in *Everquest 2* and cheering for the Denver Broncos.

The Eye of Madness

Tyrants of the Feydark

by Chris Youngs
art by Mark Tedin
03/11/2008

Dragon Features Archive
Dragon 362

The Feywild is commonly thought to be a reflection of the natural world. If this is true, some skeptical sages point out, then what parallel is there in the world for the mad fomorian tyrants in the Feywild? These kings and queens rule their kingdoms in the Underdark of the Feywild -- or the Feydark -- with an iron fist. Their madness is legendary, and few rulers of the Underdark can claim the level of power that these deformed creatures possess in the Feydark.

Fomorian monarchs rule their dominions mercilessly and cruelly, their tyranny fueled in part by typical fomorian madness. Among some fomorian rulers, this insanity manifests constantly, and their kingdoms are places of chaos and violence. Among others, their madness manifests in a more calculated form, allowing for rational thought, although this doesn't diminish their lust for power. All fomorian rulers, regardless of how insane, have one trait in common: extreme paranoia. For all their physical and magical might, they constantly fear rebellion from within, as well as conquest from without.

Fomorian Rule

Wielding absolute power within their kingdoms, fomorians rule their Feydark territories through fear and oppression, and few dare to challenge a fomorian's grip on a kingdom. The unique madness of each ruler means no two courts are the same. One court, that of King Borunnor, for example, embodies the enigma of fomorian rulers. One week, he might seem merciful, granting pardons and sending emissaries of peace to neighboring kingdoms. But the week following, in a mercurial shift of temperament, he is just as likely to begin an inquisition to root out traitors, slaughtering pardoned souls and triggering sleeper agents among his ambassadors. Another king might revel in blood sports and hold grand tournaments between selected champions, as well as command the public -- and graphic -- executions of political enemies and conspirators, both real and imagined.

To an outsider, chaos seems to reign in fomorian kingdoms, but there is a method to their madness. The paranoia that besets fomorian rulers is one of the prime reasons that they manage to retain their power, because their constant fear is infectious. Their subjects tend to be suspicious and are likely to turn on one another if given an opportunity, for a fomorian tyrant shows favoritism to those fey who succeed in their ruler's plots and are willing to betray their fellows to do so. Fomorian tyrants are notorious for using their spies to stir up trouble within their own governments to try to expose traitors, and many of those accused, interrogated, and publicly executed are often just courtiers who failed to plan well enough for the onset of their ruler's latest mad investigations.

Each fomorian tyrant has an extensive spy network. The most elite of their spies are the Dark Hands, fey spies and assassins that act as a tyrant's secret police. Many Dark Hands are quicklings, dryads, or members of other fey races that are skilled at stealth or deception. These spies allow a fomorian tyrant to see much that happens within a kingdom, so the tyrant relies on them but does not necessarily trust them. Due to their constant fear of insurrection, fomorian tyrants keep few allies other than their loyal cyclops bodyguards, the only other creatures a fomorian will trust. Few other servants keep their positions for long before they are moved to a new one or are relieved of duty permanently.

Not every fomorian rules a kingdom. Those fomorians who lack this power hunger for it -- a trait that fuels the fears of the leadership. Such fomorians often seek service under a fomorian king or queen and then constantly scheme to usurp power. Still other fomorians seek advancement by overthrowing a power base in the Feywild -- perhaps an eladrin city or a gnome warren -- and claiming its magic and riches as their own.

A fomorian tyrant's spy network doesn't keep tabs on internal threats only. Fomorians plot against each other constantly, which is one of the main reasons they see traitors lurking in every shadow. A fomorian knows that his or her constant scheming is not unique among fomorians, that his or her lust for power is equaled by other fomorian rulers', who are doing whatever they can to undermine one another's authority. They have sent their agents across the Feydark and the surface of the Feywild, seeking chinks in the armor of neighboring fomorian kingdoms.

The natural suspicion of a fomorian tyrant's subjects serves a kingdom well when preventing incursions from external enemies. Untrustworthy of any creature they do not recognize, the tyrant's subjects are quick to report newcomers to the Dark Hands. A tyrant's subjects and spies keep an especially watchful eye on the drow, who commonly establish outposts or enclaves within the Feydark, and the hated eladrin (see "Fomorians and the Eladrin" below). But really, any race with a chance to accumulate power in the Feywild, especially magical power, is likely to gain the attention of a fomorian tyrant's wandering eye. And woe to them, for fomorians are tenacious in their madness, and usually nothing short of death will stop them from pursuing a goal.

Entertainment

Fomorian kingdoms are filled with blood sports. Gladiatorial combat is common and usually involves captured creatures from the world as well as eladrin, other denizens of the Feywild, and supposed traitors to the crown. Sometimes these games go on for days of gory pageantry. Whether held in massive arenas built of crystal or staged as races through city streets and surrounding caverns, each contest is either to the death or, sometimes, until mutilation.

In the latter case, two opponents are given nonlethal but brutal weapons, such as lashes or staffs that emit a magical, low-damage dose of painful electricity or necrotic damage. Other times, contestants are put through a grueling series of tests. Sometimes these are public inquisitions presided over by a master torturer, and sometimes the contestants are made to compete at trivial games, with the loser being punished by the loss of a finger or possibly a nose or an ear. Some games continue until one competitor confesses to some crime, whether or not it was committed, and begs for death. The winner -- almost certainly deformed in some way -- is usually never seen again.

What happens to the winners? Those who show a penchant for surviving the deadly games of a fomorian kingdom often find themselves in a worse situation. Fomorians, perhaps because of their own disfigurements, often pursue bizarre breeding programs, trying to magically combine the fiercest creatures in the hope of creating new forces for their blood sports and armies. Those who find the most success in the gladiatorial arenas often find themselves subjected to these breeding experiments, which usually result in their minds and bodies being twisted beyond sanity. Most of these experiments go nowhere, but some result in new toys for fomorian tyrants: deadly new creatures that serve them in all manner of twisted endeavors.

The Court

A fomorian tyrant's court consists of a variety of creatures. The most common, and the roles they often assume in these bizarre hierarchies, are described below.

Cyclopses: Perhaps the creatures most instrumental in ensuring a fomorian's rule -- other than the fomorian -- are cyclopses. These one-eyed giants serve their fomorian masters unquestioningly and without hesitation. They worship their fomorian masters as gods, a belief that fomorians foster through their practice of powerful magic. No one is certain why cyclopses view their masters in this manner, and many sages debate the behavior endlessly. Cyclopses act as a fomorian's valued lieutenants, spymasters (though they rarely take to the field themselves as spies), field generals, and bodyguards, and the number of cyclopses a fomorian ruler commands serves almost as a measure of the ruler's power in the Feydark. The eladrin, among others, believe that if they could unravel the secret of the cyclopses' blind obedience, they could sever the tie between fomorians and cyclopses and weaken all fomorian kingdoms permanently.

Most cyclopses are gifted in some sort of craft. Some show a knack for creating ornate suits of magic armor or magic weapons, and fomorians value any creature that can increase their store of magic.

Quicklings: Nimble and deadly, quicklings are the most numerous fey among the Dark Hands. They form squads of spies, assassins, and saboteurs and are frequently partnered with dryads, lamias, and hags on reconnaissance missions sent to infiltrate eladrin and other settlements on the Feywild's surface.

Dryads: It seems unlikely that these creatures -- tied so strongly to their trees on the surface -- would ever serve a fomorian. But it is precisely because of the dryads' ties to the surface that fomorians value their service; dryads' knowledge of eladrin communities is considered invaluable. After quicklings, dryads form the second largest contingent of fey among the Dark Hands, and briar witch dryads frequently command large groups of spies and assassins.

Goblins: Some goblin kingdoms populate the dark reaches of certain Feywild forests. Fomorians do not restrict their activities to their own plane, and when they do turn their gaze to the world, goblins are often their proxies. Only a few goblins serve within the dark, crystalline realms of the fomorians, usually as ambassadors from their own kingdoms on the surface.

Magic

Because of how massive and brutish-looking fomorians are, many of their enemies assume that fomorians will attack only with the massive weapons they carry. While all fomorians enjoy the feel of their enemies' blood splashing against their skin, they are an inherently magical race of tremendous intelligence. Each fomorian possesses an evil eye that gives it a potent magical ability -- as well as the potent curse that is the source of a fomorian's madness.

Fomorian rulers employ some of the best magical artisans in the Feywild, some willing and some not. The cyclops armorsmiths and weaponsmiths in fomorian employ are legendary in the Feydark, although many a fomorian has enslaved members of other races. Captured dwarves are especially prized, as are enslaved shadar-kai from the Shadowfell. Fomorians value magic as highly as dragons, some say, and many adventurers and brave merchants have offered powerful magic items to gain audience with a fomorian ruler or to secure safe passage through a fomorian kingdom.

The struggle for power through the acquisition of new magic has led to some of the fiercest struggles between fomorians and the eladrin. The eladrin take to magic like a dryad to a forest and constantly develop new spells, rituals, and magic items of all sorts. Conquering one of the last bastions of eladrin power in the world ranks high on every fomorian ruler's list of desires, and they betray and compete against each other for the right to seize each eladrin city they discover. This competition among fomorians is likely what has allowed the eladrin to survive against such hostile odds in the increasingly dangerous Feywild.

Fomorians and the Eladrin

Fomorians see enemies everywhere. Their spy networks are vast, and the conspiracies they sow endless. Other than fellow fomorians, few groups in the Feywild irk fomorians more than the eladrin. In contrast to the eladrin empires of old, which sought peace and stability in the Feywild, fomorians have always sought to spread tyranny and conflict. The two races' opposing goals have destined them for conflict.

The eladrin seek harmony with the natural world, while fomorians seek to bring everything they see under their malformed thumbs. With eladrin civilization now splintered into city-states, the eladrin seem more vulnerable than ever before, and fomorians covet their powerful magic. To a fomorian -- king, queen, or ambitious upstart -- an eladrin city looks like a treasure trove waiting to be plundered. Most of the creatures will stop at nothing to crack open these vaults and strip them bare. Glorious eladrin cities fall each year to fomorian forces, their beautiful spires crushed to rubble and their vaults pillaged of powerful magic items.

Of all the varied races of the Feywild, fomorians are perhaps some of the least understood. Utterly mad but possessed of nearly unrivaled power, they rule -- or seek to rule -- with unmatched avarice and ambition. Few can get close enough to the fomorians to fully understand their paranoid and magical ways. But if eladrin scholars can agree on anything, it is this: fomorians are a threat. Wielders of immense power, fomorians always crave more, and the threat they represent is not restricted to the Feywild. Who knows what they could do if given unrestricted access to a portal to the world . . . if this hasn't happened already.

About the Author

Chris Youngs is a producer for D&D Insider and a big fan of evil monsters with magic eyes that lurk in the dark places of the world. When he grows up, that's what he'd like to be. He also promises this is the last *Dragon* article for issue #362.

Zeitgeists

by Hal Maclean
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Some scholars, trying to make sense of the disparate deeds of countless millions, claim that each historical era has its own particular theme influencing every soul born into it. According to them, this zeitgeist, literally the "spirit" (geist) of the "time" (zeit), acts as destiny's guillotine, pitilessly choosing winners and losers based upon how closely they adhere to the demands of the age. They believe that when the zeitgeist beats the drums of war, armies march into an apocalypse of blood and terror. On the other hand, they also hold that

if the zeitgeist challenges mankind to push against the borders of the unknown, explorers sail beyond the horizon in search of new lands even as scientists retreat to their laboratories, plumbing the mysteries of the universe like never before. In their darkest moments, they even fear that when the zeitgeist demands ignorance and fanaticism, the Inquisition stalks the night, thirsting for unbelievers and infidels to put to torment beyond imagination.

Of course, in our world, one of science and reason, most simply treat the zeitgeist as a convenient fiction. However, in a world of magic, where powerful alien gods suddenly rise to ascendancy, or the stars themselves sometimes form new constellations in a single night, the zeitgeist, birthing ages of legend or horror, could prove very real indeed. This article gives DMs the tools to apply the zeitgeist, and the ages it create, to a campaign world.

It begins with a discussion of threshold eras, the times between ages when the future hangs in doubt, giving mortals the chance to affect the destinies of future generations. From there, it offers up a number of different scenarios to resolve a threshold era, giving DMs the option of setting an adventure, or entire campaign, during one of these moments of great upheaval. It then explores ways in which the zeitgeist could shape events, and the actions of NPCs, by considering, in a broad sense, how campaigns set during a particular age might unfold.

Threshold Eras

Physicists tell us that the universe rests upon an uneasy foundation of a handful of mighty forces locked in constant struggle. When the equilibrium between these forces shifts, upsetting the balance of power, cataclysm follows, whether in a localized region of space or the entire cosmos, until order reestablishes itself. If the zeitgeist actually does exist, it might function in a similar way except that instead of a struggle between such impersonal forces as gravity and nuclear bonds, it attempts to regulate the conflict between concepts such as war, decay, and chaos. Acting as a pressure release, the zeitgeist periodically gives one of these timeless ideals a chance to temporarily seize pre-eminence, establishing a new equilibrium, without a cataclysm, by creating threshold eras.

As their name suggests, threshold eras stand between the ages -- they are times when the cosmos pauses to draw a breath, and they wait for a new zeitgeist to emerge and give shape to the age yet to come. The exact length of each threshold era varies. Some could last for decades, others for mere moments; however, they matter only if mortals have some way to influence their outcome. If the universe simply cycles through the ages, immutable, each one merely a single tick of a celestial clock, threshold eras serve no purpose. In the game, threshold eras give the PCs, and powerful NPCs, a chance to shape the future by determining the scope and exact nature of the next age. This struggle to mold the coming age, creating a time of war or peace, freedom or slavery, could easily serve as the focus for an entire campaign, spawning numerous adventures and plot threads (see "Resolving Threshold Eras" below).

The zeitgeist requires one or more sentient beings to give it focus, serving, in a sense, as the "midwife" for the age to come, determining both its nature and underlying elements. Since the zeitgeist has no soul and no consciousness, it does not question the character of those who obtain this extraordinary influence over it, embracing the most diabolical schemer as easily as a living saint. Instead, it simply waits for a champion of a particular cause or ideal to rise to prominence by overcoming all possible rivals whether through war, intrigue, or acquired prestige. Once this champion emerges, the zeitgeist uses his or her personality as the model for the coming age. For instance, a cruel miser who built up a financial empire might unleash an age of appalling greed if the zeitgeist identified him as the champion. Even a poet, celebrating the simple pastoral splendor of forest and field, could, if she attracted enough followers to her worldview, trigger an age where nature stands triumphant, drowning cities and empires beneath a tide of trees.

While it is perhaps a somewhat odd experience getting drafted by the zeitgeist to serve as the model for a new age, it deals no lasting harm. Since, by definition, the champion the zeitgeist selects must enjoy great influence and power over the world, he or she could remain on the scene for a considerable amount of time afterward. In some cases, the champion may even live until the end of the age and the start of the next threshold era.

Resolving Threshold Eras

The key question when dealing with a threshold era is exactly how people affect the zeitgeist and the age to come. As mentioned above, sometimes the zeitgeist might simply pick the most influential person of the day, letting the ambitious clash until one stands supreme; but that is just one possibility. Fantasy writers, long intrigued by the potential of the zeitgeist and the ages it creates, have come up with many other options. A few of the more popular approaches, along with some examples, appear below.

The Adversary
The zeitgeist offers itself to the one who defeats a particularly powerful, and hostile, figure. Typically these sorts of adversaries take on the character of "Dark Lords," sinister entities bent upon remaking the universe into a place of endless horror and misery.

Personifications of the peril the zeitgeist exists to prevent, adversaries rarely simply sit around waiting for someone to attack them. They usually go on the offensive by rallying armies to their banners and working dark magic to cast down potential foes, which inevitably drags them into conflict with everyone else and sets the stage for the zeitgeist to discover its champion.

One interesting variation of this approach involves casting the adversary as the person who heralded the preceding age, the zeitgeist's former champion, who refuses to yield at the start of a new threshold era. This presents the DM with many more interesting motivations for the adversary than pure malevolence. However, this approach also usually requires some sort of catastrophe to occur should the adversary win out (particularly if he or she hopes to continue a generally positive era). Alternatively, the adversary might resolve to defend an age that has pushed the world too far in one direction, which then requires a fresh start with a new dominant zeitgeist to rebalance things (for instance, an age of technology that has greatly harmed the environment). Blind to the risks of maintaining the status quo, no matter how wondrous, or perhaps simply taking the excesses of a previous age to a dangerous extreme, these adversaries make for much more realistic, and formidable, opponents.

Examples of Adversaries: Lord Foul from *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* series by Stephen R. Donaldson, the Dark One from *The Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan, and the Crimson King from the *Dark Tower* series by Steven King.

Avatars
Periodically the gods, or similar beings who represent particular philosophies and worldviews, take on mortal form -- beginning a new threshold era -- entering the world as infants and only slowly learning their powers and true nature as they reach adulthood.

Usually, despite their temporary absence from their seats of power, divine magic continues to flow to mortals, allowing clerics and the like to cast spells even as the gods lie squalling in a cradle. Eventually these avatars, each representing one of the possible ages to come, gather followers and resources, the first steps in total war. The avatar who wins this great struggle, defeating his or her peers, determines the next age.

This approach offers DMs several interesting variations, including the option of keeping the true identities of these avatars a secret from the PCs and perhaps at first doing so with the avatars themselves. A mighty paladin and general, an ally of the PCs, might actually be the avatar of war, putting a very different spin on his quest to purge evil from the world. If the PCs help their friend build up his army, they could inadvertently lay the groundwork for an age of war to follow. Similarly, a sanctimonious cleric with political ambitions, who regards the PCs as dangerous louts, might actually be the avatar of good despite his own personal failings. This could put the PCs in an awkward position, requiring them to help someone they loathe seize power.

Examples of Avatars: *The Troy Game* series by Sara Douglass, the *Lords of Dûs* series by Lawrence Watt-Evans, and the *Winter of the World* series by Michael Scott Rohan.

The Great Trial
The zeitgeist responds to a particular ritual or test as the threshold era ebbs, using the first person or group to succeed as the model upon which to base the next age. Often this test requires considerable preparation, laying the groundwork for a number of preliminary adventures as the candidates gather the proper ingredients, suffer the mandated trials, or obtain other necessary components. The courage and determination needed to succeed guarantees that only the truly driven even attempt it, throwing the PCs into conflict with the craftiest, most ruthless NPCs in the campaign.

One interesting variation on this approach involves creating some sort of massive testing area, a "super dungeon" that only those chosen by the zeitgeist may safely enter and explore. Monsters and NPCs, lured by the zeitgeist like moths to a flame, separate the wheat from the chaff, eliminating the teams who actually prepared themselves to shape the zeitgeist before entering it. Since, in the end, only one of these teams can enter the secret chamber buried deep within the dungeon and pass the final, lethal test, competition amongst the teams themselves could prove just as deadly.

Examples of Great Trials: Stormbringer (and related *Eternal Champion* stories) by Michael Moorcock, the *Sandman* sequence of comic books by Neil Gaiman, and Sir Galahad's quest for the Holy Grail.

Prophecy
The zeitgeist reveals itself, and its secrets, to a handful of mortals who, in an all but hopeless attempt to make sense of its endless complexity, use metaphor and symbolism to convey the truths they learned. Those seeking to seize control of the zeitgeist must interpret the advice offered by these people, long dead or perhaps utterly insane, and use it to guide their actions. While very popular in fantasy fiction, where the author enjoys complete control, DMs must take care when using this approach so that they never leave their players feeling railroaded. Prophecies should also contain enough ambiguity to spark a party's imagination as they work out their own interpretations.

One interesting variation of this approach involves creating several different prophecies, perhaps one for each of the possible ages to come and treating them, in a sense, as recipes or formulas. This gives each faction, and each powerful individual, the luxury of choosing which prophecy to promote and which to thwart. The threshold era becomes a Darwinian struggle between competing ideals, with partisans trying to manufacture the omens needed to make the prophecy they support come about while sabotaging those of their rivals.

Examples of Prophecy: The Prophecies of Valon from the *Babylon 5* television series, the *Belgariad* series by David Eddings, and the Karethon cycle from the *Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan.

Treasure Hunt
As the threshold era draws to an end, the zeitgeist coalesces around one or more powerful talismans, using the personalities of those who control (or in some cases destroy) these items as the model for the next age. If their temperaments conflict, the age to come suffers from these flaws as well, mixing various qualities in a chaotic jumble. For instance, a teacher, driven to guide people toward enlightenment, and a warrior, driven to crush his enemies, together might create an age of repression, where those who disagree with the "truth" endure torment and persecution. The more of these items a person holds, the greater his or her impact on the next age, laying the groundwork for a deadly scavenger hunt amongst the campaign's most powerful factions.

This approach works particularly well when the items also possess other, lesser properties, allowing the DM to slip one into a monster hoard as a piece of magic treasure. When the PCs find their item, it immediately plunges them into the middle of secret war, with thieves and assassins dogging their footsteps. Over time, as they grow in levels and power, building up their own networks of allies, they could advance from mere pawns to movers and shakers themselves, eventually putting their own spin on the next age. Examples of Treasure Hunts: The Lord of the Rings series by J.R.R. Tolkien, the Dark is Rising series by Susan Cooper, and the Book of Lost Swords series by Fred Saberhagen.

Bridge Campaigns

While threshold eras, by definition, serve as the defining crisis of their day, and resolving one usually acts as a natural climax for a campaign, some DMs (not to mention players) might like to see what happens next. Bridge campaigns, beginning during a threshold era and then moving into the age that follows, allow just that. When planning a bridge campaign, DMs must take extra care in resolving the threshold era since events continue afterward. This means, among other things, that the DM should pay close attention to the rewards (magic items, special abilities, favors/contacts with powerful NPCs, improved social status, and so on) the PCs gain from their involvement in resolving the threshold era.

Similarly, the DM should make sure to leave plenty of room for character advancement during the age that follows. One simple way to do this involves planning to end the campaign when the PCs reach a certain level and then begin the process of resolving the threshold era once the PCs pass the half-way mark and then concluding before the two-third mark. For instance, in a bridge campaign intended to last until 20th level, resolving the threshold era should span levels 10, 11, and 12 with the remainder of the campaign set during the era that follows.

Using Ages to Shape your Campaign

Threshold eras serve as crossroads -- as moments in history where mortals may seize the power to shape the future for countless generations to come. However, despite their importance, they appear very rarely -- most of the time the cosmos follows the path laid out for it by the zeitgeist. This offers DMs a very powerful tool for world building and also presents a built-in rationale for any home rules they want to include in their campaigns. For instance, a campaign in a bleak, frozen wasteland seems an odd place for *flamestrike* spells, not to mention fire elementals. Setting it during an age where fire magic is on the rise goes a long way toward fixing this problem. Similarly, an age of territorial conquest followed by an age of decay and isolationism offers up an excellent rationale for an abundance of dungeons and ruins scattered across the landscape.

Each age has its own particular theme that overrides and influences everything else. Only the most heroic, or villainous, of souls possess the fortitude to resist the influence the zeitgeist casts upon an age and often even those who manage this feat find themselves punished for it. In an age of war, those who rely upon peace treaties are the first to fall when their resurgent neighbors roar across the border. During an age of exploration, those who shun risk miss out on countless opportunities, and they earn the scorn of society for their timidity. In an age of repression, those who preach tolerance soon fall beneath the Inquisitions' iron boot and find themselves cast into its cleansing flames.

Sample Ages
Destiny paints a portrait for each age that draws upon the entire spectrum of mortal experience, dabbing a sullen, angry red as easily as a vibrant, expansive green, or a calm, placid blue. However, the zeitgeist chooses one of these colors to overlay everything else in each age, creating a paramount stain that bleeds into each nook and cranny of the cosmos. This theme, usually encapsulated with a single word like war or decay, touches every heart and sways debate in the councils of the mighty as easily as it stirs passions in the meanest hovel. DMs looking to set a campaign during a particular age should use the notes below as inspiration.

Age of Blood
In an age of blood, personal connections and personal feuds take precedence over all other concerns. Family and kinship ties exert a much stronger pull than the bonds of a nation or any other social organization. Though larger communities, or even countries, still exist, they seem more like loose federations of allied clans than a unified citizenry. These clans exist almost as independent states, huddling together in strongholds or urban enclaves, patrolled by their own private armies and ruled by elders revered for the wily cunning required to reach old age during such cutthroat times.

The age leaves people believing they share an almost mystical connection with their relatives that causes them to rise or fall along with their relatives. This makes both nepotism and savage blood feuds commonplace, along with a very prickly sensitivity to shame and humiliation since it, in a very real sense, diminishes everyone a person truly cares about. Perhaps because of this extra vitality, vampires tend to flourish during an age of blood, often serving as champions for their families, who weaken rival clans by stealing their vital essence.

Age of Chaos
In an age of chaos, uncertainty reigns triumphant while the majesty of the law and organization withers. Few genuine governments, with all their trappings of civil servants, codes of law, and the like, actually exist; most people simply live under the thumb of their most powerful, or ruthless, neighbor. Often, the dominant social organization resembles that of a street gang with their leaders, those most practiced at the savage, Darwinian struggle for dominance demanded of the age, holding court amidst the ruins of a dying civilization.

The age encourages selfishness and a bleak nihilism, rewarding betrayal and deceit while punishing those with a sense of integrity and justice. Odd phenomena, both magical and natural, seem almost commonplace, with strange weather, bizarre mutations, and mystical catastrophes happening virtually every day. The ranks of aberrations and other twisted freaks swell, but many creatures dependent upon the steady flow of magic for their existence, particularly constructs, find the fluctuations of the age nearly intolerable. In an age of chaos, success often seems to come through fluke rather than hard work, discouraging people from planning, or building, for the future.

Age of Decay

In the age of decay, corruption and apathy devours both institutions and people from within, leaving nothing but hollow shells that collapse under the slightest pressure. Much of the land seems dominated by great empires, with powerful bureaucracies and miles of red tape to entangle the hapless citizenry; however corruption, inefficiency, and nearly constant maneuvering for position leaves these empires all but paralyzed. From the highest to the lowest, a pervading sense of entitlement and self-interest rules, smothering ideals such as duty and honor. It causes generals to throw away armies in schemes calculated to discredit rivals even if it leaves the empire they serve fatally vulnerable as easily as it drives farmers to plant luxury crops in times of famine.

The age encourages decadence, with the surrender to unspeakable vices rendering members of every social strata enfeebled and dissipated. This moral decay seeps into every other facet of life, leaving crumbling buildings, the decline of scholarship, and even a weakening of the flesh that leads to the spread of innumerable plagues (including lycanthropy) in its wake. Even nature dwindles away before the creeping malaise of the age; trees, smothered by mold and mildew, collapse in merely brisk winds, while animals whelp litters with far too many runts. The pervading sense of failure and gloom leaves many feeling strangely cheated, giving rise to a cultural fascination with death and the next life, causing them to lavish extraordinary amounts of time and energy on their funerals and their tombs. This preoccupation with death leads to a dramatic rise in the frequency and raw power of the undead who call the age home.

Age of Heroes
In the age of heroes, the deeds of the few determine the fates of the many, whether for good or ill. The success or failure of every great cause ultimately depends upon the tiny handful serving as its champions, rendering even entire legions, in a sense, merely spectators to the drama. Most people live in city-states large enough to support armies, temples, and all the other trappings of civilization, but they are still small enough to make the reign of a single, legendary, ruler possible. Above all else, it is an age of strong passions rather than statecraft, where thousands die due to the personal feuds and petty squabbles of a few champions.

The age pushes most into a subordinate role, leaving them content to serve merely as spear-carriers and sidekicks, cheerfully assisting the heroes of the age as they carve their names in the history books. Even the magically gifted often act as advisors and foils, their power to directly harm an opponent greatly reduced, forcing them to ensnare minds or alter forms rather than to rain fiery destruction upon a foe. However, the heroes themselves seldom find much time to enjoy their status -- in addition to the constant maneuvering for

position amongst their own kind they must also grapple with a seemingly endless supply of monstrous foes. Emerging from vast swathes of untamed wilderness, places where civilization fears to tread, these deadly creatures prey upon the hapless peasants and townsfolk who depend upon the heroes to protect them.

Age of Light
In the age of light, darkness, whether in the mortal heart or simply in the night sky, pales and grows noticeably weaker. A spirit of altruism, only partially explained by the abundance of food sparked by prolonged growing seasons, pervades the land, leaving people with the opportunity and need to help those less fortunate than themselves. Most people find little need for governments, preferring to solve their problems through compromise and negotiation, trusting in good will rather than appealing to some remote authority. Some organized groups still exist, particularly the temples of good deities, universities, and craft guilds, and during those rare moments of crisis they step in to provide the leadership normally offered by governments in less enlightened ages.

Most people lead simple, quiet lives, taking joy in their work, their friends, and their families, and they give little thought to great causes and spend little time jealously brooding upon the good fortune of others. The age encourages gentle, moderate climates, with winters both brief and mild, and plentiful rain to ensure bountiful crops. At times the sun seems almost reluctant to cede the sky, often creating warm, languid sunsets that stretch on for hours. These prolonged days, coupled with the generous spirits of most of those who call the age home, leave little room for evil or malice. Few creatures wedded to the darkness, particularly fiends and those who traffic with them, exist, causing some to consider them merely the fodder of stories.

Age of Nature
In the age of nature, the wilderness all but buries the trappings of civilization. Few, if any, settled communities exist -- even individual farms are oddities since most people live as hunter/gatherers wandering the world in search of food. Sometimes members of one of these bands come upon the crumbling ruins of once mighty cities, and, as they pause for a day or two, their elders tell stories of how one day their ancestors simply walked away. Each elder offers up his or her own explanation for why the settled races suddenly turned their backs upon civilization; famine, war, a spiritual awakening. What matters is that most people consider life in settled communities almost like a prison.

The age rewards those able to live in harmony with nature, ensuring them plentiful supplies of fish and game while blessing them with keen senses to find edible plants and fresh water. Most people need only spend ten or twenty hours a week in pursuit of the necessities of life, giving them plenty of time to follow their passions and to hone their innate gifts. The age is far from idyllic however; like nature itself, savagery always lurks just beneath the surface, sometimes erupting into ferocious conflicts as hunters from rival bands stalk each other in deadly games of cat and mouse. While few of those born into the age master the arts of civilization, particularly writing or metalsmithing, both arcane and divine magic still exists, albeit in a somewhat more primitive state.

However, "unnatural" creatures, especially undead, constructs, and aberrations, find it quite difficult to thrive in the age of nature, but most other creatures soon discover their place in the duet between predator and prey.

Age of Tyranny

In an age of tyranny, authority recognizes few, if any, restraints upon its whims, whether within a family, faith, or nation as a whole. Every person goes through life with an almost instinctive understanding of where he or she fits within the overall hierarchy and a burning need to advance by any means, whether fair or foul. The age promotes the spread of great empires led by absolute rulers propped up by merciless enforcers. Those who violate the orthodoxy of society soon find themselves brutally kicked back in line.

The age rewards those who conform and punishes those who rebel. In each area of life there is a single acceptable way of doing things: one church, one government, one economic system, with savage reprisals for those who refuse to toe the line. Creatures with

an instinctive ability to cooperate and submit to authority tend to prosper far more than those with an individualist streak. Demons, slaadi, and other creatures wedded to chaos all but fade away during an age of tyranny.

Age of War
In an age of war, violence, particularly organized violence, seems the natural way to settle disputes. Most people feel an almost overwhelming desire to live near their own "kind," a kinship, whether based upon criteria such as race, alignment, religion, national identity, or something else, that strongly colors their opinions of every other group. This distrust, at times even hatred, for those who are different causes them to live in a state of almost constant fear. The rampant xenophobia of the age drives most people to live within guarded and walled communities, and they usually leave them only to raid their neighbors, all the while hoping for safety that is brought about by killing their neighbors or at least driving them far, far away.

People born into the age tend to feel a strong loyalty toward members of their own group while at the same time loathing outsiders. In most places, hybrids, whether half-orcs or half-celestials, experience tremendous hardships -- usually only those who prove their absolute devotion to the group that raised them survive to adulthood. However, since above all else the age worships the practice of arms, those who master weaponry soon find their place, as do those who learn to serve the age by channeling magic to destroy their enemies.

About the Author

Hal Maclean has seen several of his articles get published in *Dragon* and *Dungeon* Magazines. Watch for his work in *GM Gems: A Tome of Inspiration for Fantasy Game Masters* from Goodman Games.

AMPERSAND

Sneak Attack!

by Bill Slavicsek
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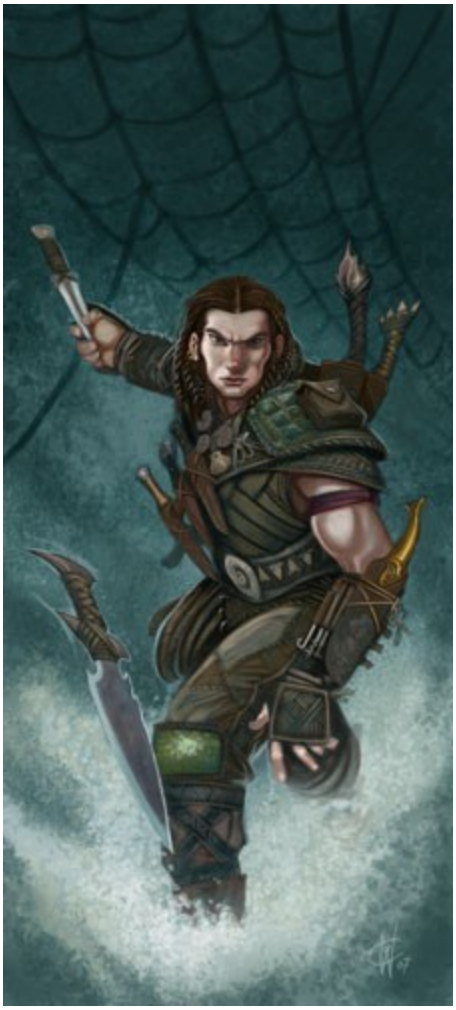

This month, we're granting everyone a surprise round before the actual launch of the 4th Edition of **Dungeons & Dragons**. During this surprise round, a bunch of my staff is heading to the **D&D Experience** in Virginia to play 4E with people, show off the latest art, unveil the rest of the year's slate of products, and provide a new look at the elements of **D&D Insider**. It's an exciting time!

Not only are we in the midst of seeing finished galleys of the core books here in the office, but we're about to enter the final stage before the launch of 4E. To me, this last sprint kicks off with **D&D Experience**. At the show, fans and players get to mingle with Chris Perkins, Andy Collins, Rob Heinsoo, James Wyatt, Mike Mearls, and Chris Youngs from my R&D team, as well as with The Rouse and Sarah Girard from the Brand Team, Didier Monin, and the great folks in Organized Play. It should be a wonderful event.

At the event, everyone will get to see the new game system in action. Games will be played, secrets will be revealed, and amazing **D&D Insider** features will take center stage. I'm sure the various tidbits that get revealed will be reported here and elsewhere as they happen, but I want to kick off the festivities with my own surprise round.

What better way to get everyone excited and talking than to show off one of the class write-ups from the new *Player's Handbook*? And what class more typifies the surprise round than the rogue? What follows is the opening spread for the rogue class, as well as a few of the powers available to rogue characters.

You're going to see something called "builds" in the information that follows. Builds present themes that you can use to guide you as you select powers and other abilities. You can follow the advice of a build, or you can ignore it. It's not a constraint, but instead provides information to help you make informed choices as you create your character. Using a class build isn't required; builds exist to help guide your decisions through the process of character creation and each time you level up.

If you're going to attend **D&D Experience**, say hello to the gang for me. In the meantime, enjoy this surprise peek at the rogue. Hurry, though. You know how sneaky the rogue can be.

Rogue

"You look surprised to see me. If you'd been paying attention, you might still be alive."

CLASS TRAITS

Role: Striker. You dart in to attack, do massive damage, and then retreat to safety. You do best when teamed with a defender to flank enemies.
Power Source: Martial. Your talents depend on extensive training and constant practice, innate skill, and natural coordination.
Key Abilities: Dexterity, Strength, Charisma

Armor Training: Leather
Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, hand crossbow, shuriken, sling, short sword
Bonus to Defense: +2 Reflex

Hit Points at 1st Level: 12 + Constitution score
Hit Points per Level Gained: 5
Healing Surges: 6 + Constitution modifier

Trained Skills: Stealth and Thievery plus four others. From the class skills list below, choose four more trained skills at 1st level.
Class Skills: Acrobatics (Dexterity), Athletics (Str), Bluff (Cha), Dungeoneering (Wis), Insight (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Perception (Wis), Stealth (Dexterity), Streetwise (Cha), Thievery (Dexterity)

Build Options: Brawny rogue, trickster rogue
Class Features: First Strike, Rogue Tactics, Rogue Weapon Talent, Sneak Attack

Rogues are cunning and elusive adversaries. Rogues slip into and out of shadows on a whim, pass anywhere across the field of battle without fear of reprisal, and appear suddenly only to drive home a lethal blade.

As a rogue, you might face others' preconceptions regarding your motivations, but your nature is your own to mold. You could be an agent fresh from the deposed king's shattered intelligence network, an accused criminal on the lam seeking to clear your name, a wiry performer whose goals transcend the theatrical stage, a kid trying to turn around your hard-luck story, or a daredevil thrill-seeker who can't get enough of the adrenaline rush of conflict. Or perhaps you are merely in it for the gold, after all.

With a blade up your sleeve and a concealing cloak across your shoulders, you stride forth, eyes alight with anticipation. What worldly wonders and rewards are yours for the taking?

ROGUE OVERVIEW

Characteristics: Combat advantage provides the full benefit of your powers, and a combination of skills and powers helps you gain and keep that advantage over your foes. You are a master of skills, from Stealth and Thievery to Bluff and Acrobatics.

Religion: Rogues prefer deities of the night, luck, freedom, and adventure, such as Sehanine and Avandra. Evil and chaotic evil rogues often favor Lolth or Zehir.

Races: Those with a love for secrets exchanged in shadows and change for its own sake make ideal rogues, including elves, tieflings, and halflings.

Creating a Rogue

The trickster rogue and the brawny rogue are the two rogue builds, one relying on bluffs and feints, the other on brute strength. Dexterity, Charisma, and Strength are the rogue's most important ability scores.

Brawny Rogue
You like powers that deal plenty of damage, aided by your Strength, and also stun, immobilize, knock down, or push your foes. Your attacks use Dexterity, so keep that your highest ability score. Strength should be a close second ... it increases your damage directly, and it can determine other effects of your attacks. Charisma is a good third ability score, particularly if you want to dabble in powers from the other rogue build. Select the brutal scoundrel rogue tactic, and look for powers that pack a lot of damage into every punch.

Suggested Feat: Weapon Focus (Human feat: Toughness)
Suggested Skills: Athletics, Dungeoneering, Intimidate, Stealth, Streetwise, Thievery

Suggested At-Will Powers: Piercing Strike, Riposte Strike
Suggested Encounter Power: Torturous Strike
Suggested Daily Power: Easy Target

Trickster Rogue
You like powers that deceive and misdirect your foes. You dart in and out of the fray in combat, dodging your enemies' attacks or redirecting them to other foes. Most of your attack powers rely on Dexterity, so that should be your best ability score. Charisma is important for a few attacks, for Charisma-based skills you sometimes use in place of attacks, and for other effects that depend on successful attacks, so make Charisma your second-best score. Strength is useful if you want to choose powers intended for the other rogue build. Select the artful dodger rogue tactic. Look for powers that take advantage of your high Charisma score, as well as those that add to your trickster nature.

Suggested Feat: Backstabber (Human feat: Human Perseverance)
Suggested Skills: Acrobatics, Bluff, Insight, Perception, Stealth, Thievery
Suggested At-Will Powers: Deft Strike, Sly Flourish
Suggested Encounter Power: Positioning Strike
Suggested Daily Power: Trick Strike

Rogue Class Features

All rogues share these class features.

First Strike
At the start of an encounter, you have combat advantage against any creatures that have not yet acted in that encounter.

Rogue Tactics
Rogues operate in a variety of ways. Some rogues use their natural charm and cunning trickery to deceive foes. Others rely on brute strength to overcome their enemies.

Choose one of the following options.

Artful Dodger: You gain a bonus to AC equal to your Charisma modifier against opportunity attacks.
Brutal Scoundrel: You gain a bonus to Sneak Attack damage equal to your Strength modifier.

The choice you make also provides bonuses to certain rogue powers. Individual powers detail the effects (if any) your Rogue Tactics selection has on them.

Rogue Weapon Talent
When you wield a shuriken, your weapon damage die increases by one size. When you wield a dagger, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls.

Sneak Attack
Once per round, when you have combat advantage against an enemy and are using a light blade, a crossbow, or a sling, your attacks against that enemy deal extra damage. As you advance in level, your extra damage increases.

Level	Sneak Attack Damage
1st - 10th	+2d6
11th - 20th	+3d6
21st - 30th	+5d6

Rogue Powers

Your powers are daring exploits that draw on your personal cunning, agility, and expertise. Some powers reward a high Charisma and are well suited for the trickster rogue, and others reward a high Strength and appeal to the brawny rogue, but you are free to choose any power you like.

Deft Strike
Rogue Attack 1
A final lunge brings you into an advantageous position.

At-Will [ ] **Martial**, **Weapon**
Standard Action

Melee or **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a crossbow, a light blade, or a sling.
Target: One creature
Special: You can move 2 squares before the attack.
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC

Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Increase damage to 2[W] + Dexterity modifier at 21st level.

Piercing Strike
Rogue Attack 1
A needle-sharp point slips past armor and into tender flesh.

At-Will [ ] **Martial**, **Weapon**
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex

Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Increase damage to 2[W] + Dexterity modifier at 21st level.

Positioning Strike
Rogue Attack 1
A false stumble and a shove place the enemy exactly where you want him.

Encounter [ ] **Martial**, **Weapon**
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Will

Hit: 1[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and you slide the target 1 square.
Artful Dodger: You slide the target a number of squares equal to your Charisma modifier.

Torturous Strike
Rogue Attack 1
If you twist the blade in the wound just so, you can make your enemy howl in pain.

Encounter [ ] **Martial**, **Weapon**
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC

Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Brutal Scoundrel: You gain a bonus to the damage roll equal to your Strength modifier.

Tumble
Rogue Utility 2
You tumble out of harm's way, dodging the opportunistic attacks of your enemies.

Encounter [ ] **Martial**
Move Action
Personal
Prerequisite: You must be trained in Acrobatics.

Effect: You can shift a number of squares equal to one-half your speed.

Crimson Edge
Rogue Attack 9
You deal your enemy a vicious wound that continues to bleed, and like a shark, you circle in for the kill.

Daily [ ] **Martial**, **Weapon**
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Fortitude

Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target takes ongoing damage equal to 5 + your Strength modifier and grants combat advantage to you (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage, and no ongoing damage.

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and **D&D Insider** content managers working on **Dungeons & Dragons**, ***Star Wars***, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.

AMPERSAND

The Devil's in the Details

by Bill Slavicsek
art by Arnie Swekel
01/25/2008

Ampersand Archive
Dragon 362

Last month, I shared the elf racial entry from the upcoming 4th Edition *Player's Handbook* with you. It went over so well that I thought I'd do something like it again this month. This time, though, I've decided to dive into the *Monster Manual* files and see how that book is coming along. Just today, for example, Mike Mearls and I finished reviewing every minion and swarm in the book, making sure that the rules for these are clear, concise, and easy to use at the table. I was going to show you one of those, but while they're all cool and great for the game, they aren't anywhere near the sexiest monsters in the book. No, I want to share with you something meaty, something substantial, and something well and truly at the top of the pile of **D&D** monsters. Something new won't work for this purpose, since I want you to be able to compare the 3E version to the 4th Edition version if you have a desire to make such a comparison.

For all these reasons and more (and because the art sketch by Arnie Swekel is just wonderful), I've settled on the pit fiend. Here's the entry from the new *Monster Manual* in all its current glory. Enjoy!

PIT FIEND

Nobles of the Nine Hells, pit fiends form an elite ruling class that oversees vast numbers of lesser devils. Only the archdevils known as the Lords of the Nine stand higher than the pit fiends.

Each pit fiend is lord of a large domain within one of the layers of the Nine Hells and is vassal to the archdevil who rules that layer. A pit fiend might govern a city, command a fortress, lead a great legion, or serve as a seneschal or counselor for an archdevil. With the exception of Asmodeus, each Lord of the Nine commands no more than a dozen or so pit fiends.

As the lords, barons, viziers, and generals of the Nine Hells, pit fiends rarely confront adventurers in person. They are the progenitors of devilish schemes, and they step in only when important plans go awry or when great plots reach fruition. In the Nine Hells proper, pit fiends command vast numbers of lesser devils. Penetrating the defenses of a pit fiend's castle and destroying the mighty devil in its own demesne is a deed of truly epic proportions.

Description
This hulking devil stands 12 feet tall and has red scales, leathery wings, and a long whiplike tail. It carries a massive mace and wears an ornate breastplate decorated with evil runes and symbols.

Pit Fiend Level 26 Elite Soldier (Leader)
Large immortal humanoid (devil) **XP** 18,000
Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
Aura of Fear (Fear) aura 5; enemies in the aura take a - 2 penalty on attack rolls.
Aura of Fire (Fire) aura 5; enemies that enter or start their turns in the aura take 15 fire damage.
HP 350; **Bloodied** 175
AC 44; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 40
Resist 30 fire, 15 poison
Saving Throws +2
Speed 12, fly 12 (clumsy), teleport 10
Action Points 1
Melee Flametouched Mace (standard; at-will) * **Fire, Weapon**
Reach 2; +31 vs. AC; 1d12+11 fire damage plus ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
Melee Tail Sting (standard; at-will) * **Poison**
+31 vs. AC; 1d6+11 damage, and the pit fiend may make a free followup attack.
Followup: +29 vs. Fortitude; ongoing 15 poison damage, and the target is weakened (save ends both effects).
Melee Pit Fiend Frenzy (standard; at-will)
The pit fiend makes a flametouched mace attack and a tail sting attack.

Ranged Point of Terror (minor; at-will) * **Fear**
Range 5; +30 vs. Will; the target takes a - 5 penalty to all defenses until the end of the pit fiend's next turn.
Ranged Irresistible Command (minor 1/round; at-will) * **Charm, Fire**
Range 10; affects one allied devil of lower level than the pit fiend; the target immediately slides up to 5 squares and explodes, dealing 2d10+5 fire damage to all creatures in a close burst 2. The exploding devil is destroyed.
Infernal Summons (standard; encounter) * **Conjuration**
The pit fiend summons a group of devil allies. Summoned devils roll initiative to determine when they act in the initiative order and gain a +4 bonus to attack rolls as long as the pit fiend is alive. They remain until they are killed, dismissed by the pit fiend (free action), or the encounter ends. PCs do not earn experience points for killing these summoned creatures. The pit fiend chooses to summon one of the following groups of devils:

- 8 legion devil legionnaires (level 21), or
- 2 war devils (level 22), or
- 1 war devil (level 22) and 4 legion devil legionnaires (level 21)

Tactical Teleport (standard; recharge 4 5 6) * **Teleportation**
The pit fiend can teleport up to 2 allies within 10 squares of it. The targets appear in any other unoccupied squares within 10 squares of the pit fiend.
Alignment Evil
Languages Supernal
Skills Bluff +27, Intimidate +27, Religion +24
Str 32 (+24) **Dex** 24 (+20) **Wis** 20 (+18)
Con 27 (+21) **Int** 22 (+19) **Cha** 28 (+22)
Equipment flametouched mace, noble signet ring

Pit Fiend Tactics
A pit fiend fights close to its enemies, catching them in its *aura of fear* and *aura of fire*. On the first round of combat, it spends an action point to use *infernal summons*. It then uses *point of terror* against a tough-looking foe and *tactical teleport* to place two allies in flanking positions around that foe. With its remaining minor action, the pit fiend uses *irresistible command* on an ally within range.

A pit fiend alternates between *point of terror* and *irresistible command*, sometimes using both if it has a spare move action it can replace with a minor action. Otherwise, the pit fiend uses *pit fiend frenzy*, teleporting as needed to gain a better position.

A pit fiend does not sacrifice its life needlessly and makes a tactical retreat if death is imminent.

Pit Fiend Lore
A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check:

DC 25: Pit fiends are the nobles of the Nine Hells. Each pit fiend serves as a vassal to one of the nine archdevils and commands a fortress, city, or army in its master's domain.

DC 30: Once every 99 years, a pit fiend can grant a mortal's wish by performing a terrible ritual. Only the most powerful and promising of mortals are offered such a temptation.

DC 35: Well-known pit fiends include Baalzephon, one of the powerful circle of pit fiends known as the Dark Eight; Gazra, who governs the city of Abriymoch in Phlegethos, the Fourth Hell; and Baalberith, the major-domo of the palace of Asmodeus.

What else is going on around here right now? The *Player's Handbook* is in Typesetting, and we're poring over the galleys to make every last improvement we can before it goes to print. The *Monster Manual* is in its last two weeks of Managing Editing, the stage right before it goes into Typesetting. And the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is about to leave Editing and enter its Managing Editing stage. So, from a certain point of view, the end of the process is in sight. At the same time, all kinds of other things are in process or just beginning.

For example, our *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* and *Player's Guide* have just entered Development, and Design is underway on a number of projects -- many of which I can't talk about just yet. As for D&D Insider, maybe I'll take some time next month to talk about how the digital initiative is shaping up.

Meanwhile, I need to select monsters from this wonderful *Monster Manual* file for my game tomorrow night. Let's see if Biggy Small and company can get out of this one -- bwaHAHA!

Until then ...

Keep playing!

--Bill Slavicsek

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and **D&D Insider** content managers working on **Dungeons & Dragons**, ***Star Wars***, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.

D&D Resolutions

by Shelly Mazzanoble
01/16/2008

Confessions Archive
Dragon 362

It's just a few days before the New Year and I'm about twelve words into a column that's due in ... well ... now. I credit my procrastination to the fact I am on vacation and if it isn't covered in chocolate or getting a redesign on HGTV, I ain't interested. What does this have to do with **Dungeons & Dragons**? Not much, except for the fact that no more procrastinating is going on my New Year's Resolution list. If I'm to follow the recent barrage of television commercials on HGTV, my list of resolutions should include organize my life, lose a bunch of weight, and make this be the year I find that someone special who apparently has been searching this whole time for me. Gee, sorry about that, Mr. Someone Special. Ever hear of Google?

Like 98% of the world, I never keep my resolutions, which is why my list is usually filled with inconsequential tasks like eat organic fruit or be nice to cats or read my horoscope every day.

For Wizards of the Coast, though, the list of resolutions is huge. 2008 is a big year, and essentially **D&D**'s game designers are making several resolutions to the players. 4th Edition will be bigger and better. It's easier to get into for new players, and streamlined and finessed for better game play. The rules are simplified, the game is quicker, the extras are top notch and Dungeon Mastering gets taken to a whole new level. That's a whole lotta resolving for one year. Perhaps R&D should have opted to clean out their closets.

I've only ever played 3rd edition, and not even for that long in comparison to some. Weaning me off the old and into the new is about as tough as switching a four year old from Count Chocula to Coco Puffs. But one thing I like better about 4th Edition is that it makes me feel like a better player. Not better like I know what I'm doing, but better as in more invested. I don't want to think of Astrid as a liability to my 3rd Edition party, but as I've said in the past, my affinity for her might have prevented me from fully throwing myself into the game. Seeing as though New Year's is all about parties and 2008 is all about **D&D**, I've decided to make all my resolutions be about my **D&D** party. Sorry Jenny Craig. Maybe next year.

Resolution #1: Shelly-Come-Lately-No-More

Out of the 8 people in my group (including the DM), 35% of us are always on time, 35% are almost always on time, and 25% are seldom on time. The remaining 5%? It's too soon to tell, as he's new to the group. Our rule is that if you don't come three times in a row, we stage an epic battle and use your character as a meat shield. If you survive, you can come back. If you die, we loot you and lose you. Thanks for the memories.

Unfortunately, I'm in the seldom-on time group. By seldom, I mean showing up anywhere between 5 to15 minutes late. Sometimes New DM hasn't even finished setting up the battle grid yet and sometimes the party has moved onto a new adventure.

"You're late," Scott says (on the rare occasions he's there before me).

"Sorry. Tabitha got stuck in traffic," I say.

I'm trying to improve my percentage, learning that I could use that extra 15 minutes to prepare for the day's escapade, which brings me to my next resolution.

Resolution #2: Previously On Dungeons & Dragons

I have short-term memory issues. Big time. Like walking into the kitchen, forgetting why I went in there, and walking all the way back to my desk with a dirty oatmeal bowl in my hand. Or being told as I'm heading to a meeting to tell the organizer Stacy is showing up late. I do. When Stacy walks in 15 minutes later. "Oh yeah! Stacy is coming 15 minutes late."

So how can I be expected to remember everything that happened a week ago? I can't. So, once we're all settled in, I ask New DM to do a complete recap.

There is no such thing as a stupid question, right? Right. But apparently there are such things as annoying and tedious questions. I guess most of the party doesn't have a brain like a sieve because New DM often sighs, looks around the table, and then gives an abridged, monotone version of the peppier review he performed 15 minutes prior.

"You're on the road to the keep to thwart a cult of Orcus."

"Orcas?" I ask. "I would remember whales."

"Yes. A roving pod of killer, zombie whales," New DM says.

"Why do we want to foil the zombie whales?" I ask.

"To get a sense of accomplishment. Now get moving."

All of these questions and more wouldn't have to be asked if I only took the time to write down the details when New DM told us the first time. But not only do I suffer from ADD, my entire group suffers from co-dependency issues due to being coddled by Adam, our secretary, treasurer, and unenthusiastic sherpa. Once, many sessions ago, he took the liberty of writing down the translation of a Draconic poem we found deep within a dungeon. Now, three years later, it's still his job. He keeps track of the vague clues New DM drops that go over the rest of our heads, copies of maps our employers supply us, and the names of townsfolk we've met or are looking for. He monitors our bank accounts and all the treasure we've scored. It's always, "Adam, can I get that masterwork chain shirt we looted? Adam, how many potions do we have left? Adam, can I get 4,000 gold pieces to buy a pony?" The poor guy is like a showbiz manager to six suddenly superstar teenagers. Remind me to get him a pinky ring and lunch reservations at The Ivy.

Regardless of when I show up, I will ask without fail if we've slept yet. Why can't our characters get some shuteye at some point during their six-day sabbatical? I think it's a valid question and an efficient use of the minis' time. New DM will almost always ignore my question, which prompts me to turn to my left and ask Scott the same question. The exchange goes something like this:

ME (To New DM): Have we slept yet? Tabitha wants her daily back.

NEW DM: (silence).

ME (Turning to Scott): Have we slept yet? Tabitha wants her daily back.

SCOTT (To New DM): Have we slept yet?

NEW DM: No. The game picks up where you left off. In battle.

ME: Well Tabitha managed to slip behind a boulder and catch a few Z's.

NEW DM: No, she didn't. She's right here on this square where we left her. In battle.

ME: Yes she did. You don't know what the minis do when we're not looking.

New DM will then ask the group if they'd like to stop fighting the evil band of hobgoblins to rest so that Tabitha, the wonderful Wizard of Wussville, can get her daily spell back. A chorus of "Noooooooooooo's" is heard.

"Fine, suckers," I say. "Don't come crying to me when you need a bugbear put to sleep."

Usually Marty reminds me how much I hate seeing my party coup de grace a helpless bugbear and wouldn't I rather fireblast or magic missile a dumb old human anyway? Of course! And the game resumes. From this I get my third resolution.

Resolution #3: Don't Patronize the Dungeon Master.

Sure he's a fun guy. He likes to talk about his dogs and dish about the Food Network. He even lets me write about his minty smelling hair. But for 2 hours a week he's the Dungeon Master, and I was raised to respect my DM. Well, no, actually I wasn't. But if my mom knew there was such a thing as Dungeon Masters and that I would someday have one, I'm sure she would have told me to hold him or her in high regard. So this I will try, even if he does call me a "squishy" wizard, sacrifices my hit points, and makes up rules that work against us just so he'll have something cool to put in his playtest report. So what if he's all about the TPK and pretends R&D "just

changed how that spell works" right before I was about to blow up a pack of kobolds, or makes homemade sugar-laden treats and looks at me all sad and rejected as I move them aside to make way for my stupid yogurt and granola bar. All right, this one will be a toughie, but it does lead into my next pledge.

Resolution #4: Don't Judge the Fudge

Or the pumpkin pie or the brownies or the smoked salmon, brie, or any other delicacy that shows up at the gaming table. Let's be clear here. I don't judge other people's food choices. And while I appreciate that snacks are an essential part of the game, I just choose to not indulge in what other people bring. This is not a personal attack on my fellow party members, people! I'm perfectly content with my dime bag of Kashi cereal and baby carrots. If it makes everyone feel better I will gladly take one of your Aunt Crystal's secret once-in-a-lifetime-oatmeal-cherry-chocolate-chunk cookies off the plate, wrap it in a paper towel, bring it back to my desk and pawn it off on my cube mate. Hilary loves your baking! And next week I'll bring a whole box of Kashi for us all to share.

Resolution #5: Assist Others Before Helping Myself

I'm no good in a crisis, so if you want a ride to the hospital or someone to dislodge the piece of General Tso's chicken from your throat, don't put me down as your person to contact in case of emergency. But I really want to be that person. At least in the world of **D&D**. Thank you, 4th Edition for providing every player with essentially their own personal copy of *Worst Case Dungeon Survival Handbook*. This delights me to no end, as I've always been a believer of the airline school of crisis management -- make sure you take care of yourself before assisting others.

Before 4th Edition, a Heal check meant looking down at your shoe to see what the heck you just stepped in. Now it's something I can actually do to help my fellow party members, such as Adam's wee halfing warlock, Atticus. The poor guy was knocked unconscious by a goblin on the high school javelin team. With the roll of a die and some simple addition, Tabitha gave Atticus the ability to use one of his healing reserves. He was back on his feet in no time. At least I think he was on his feet. With a halfling it's kind of hard to tell. I was filled with warm fuzzies from having saved a life, making my resolve even stronger to learn the equivalent of the Heimlich maneuver in the wizard's spellbook.

Resolution #6: Get a Change of Scenery

Does where you play affect how you play? Maybe we could game in a different conference room or at the Panda Express down the street. Or maybe it's as simple as sitting in another player's chair. No one assigned us seats, but we all seem to gravitate to the same chairs we started the campaign in. Maybe it's good luck. Maybe we're creatures of habit. All I know is that when someone else is sitting where you usually sit, it messes with everyone's feng shui.

I read somewhere that in business meetings you should always try to sit to the right of the highest-ranking person in the room. I sit to the left of New DM because I'm not that much of a goody goodie and because that's just were I planted myself on day one. But maybe there is an advantage to sitting where Marty usually sits (roughly 17 feet from the play mat) or having a warlock next to me instead of a snobby old eladrin. Maybe if I saw the game from the cleric's point of view I'd appreciate the role in the party he plays, and maybe if Scott sat in my seat he'd quit calling me things like "cream puff" and "kobold cottontail" and pretending he's speaking into a intercom system calling, "Attention shoppers. Will the wizard please join her party in the dungeon?"

Resolution #7: Get to Know Thyself

Sounds like something from a Zen-practice-a-day calendar, but in this case "thyself" is thy character. Sure, New DM has encouraged us to delve a bit into our characters' backstories, and it has added a personal touch to our game. Knowing Marty's character has a stronger than average distaste for orcs after they roasted his family's homeland makes the possibility of running into some all the more enticing. I like to think of Tabitha as a middle ages version of the game *Katamari Damacy* -- something that rolls through town, collecting a past, a bit of the present, and hopefully a future. Adding in these little nuggets of personality can only enhance Tabitha's game and hopefully that of her fellow adventurers. For instance, Scott might find out what happened to the last guy who called Tabitha a cream puff.

Resolution #8: Get a Little (More) Culture

I've got a membership card to the library, art museum, and Costco. How much more culture does a girl need? I also have a Netflix subscription, and I try to go to movies at least twice a month, but I'm ashamed to say there are some films out there easily considered classics that I haven't gotten around to seeing. In fact, I could probably get fired for admitting to a few of them, so I won't. But there have been several occasions where my fellow players have gleefully prattled off 10 minutes of dialog from one of these classics only to find me wondering what the heck is so funny about the word inconceivable? (And for the record, I get it now. Rather than break up our friendship, Adam lent me the DVD.) I guess I should save the *Mommie Dearest* quotes for Thanksgiving dinner with the family.

This is proving to be an ambitious year for someone who was content to just smile at cats. I can hardly wait for my next game to put all this pledging and vowing into action. I'll get on it as soon as I finish this "House Hunters" marathon on TV. And this can of double chocolate frosting. And maybe giving this Jenny person a call. It's always good to have back up, right?

Confessions of a Full-Time Wizard

The Down & Under Adventurer

by Shelly Mazzanoble
02/15/2008

Confessions Archive
Dragon 362

G'day, Dragon Mates. This is my last column before my whirlwind jaunt to the land down under. Judging from the emails my dad keeps sending me of what appears to be a woman with striking resemblance to myself protruding from the mouth of a crocodile or practically Saran Wrapped in deadly jellyfish, clutching her throat, and waving goodbye to loved ones on the shore, it's most likely going to be my last column. Ever. Note to my dad: Those pictures are obviously Photoshopped. By you. Quit trying to scare me!

I think we've known each other long enough where I can confess something. It may come as a shock to you but I'm not exactly the rugged type. There. I said it. This is especially true when I travel. I don't need 4-star hotels and jetted bathtubs, but there's a reason why those little shacks above liquor stores and ambiguous massage parlors are called youth hostels. They make me hostile! I wasn't into them even when I was a youth. The whole "share a bathroom with new friends from all over the world" mentality doesn't appeal to me. I didn't like sharing a bathroom with my family. Plus, "hand over your money belt" is scary even when said with a French accent and a butter knife pressed against your collarbone.

I went to a very earthy, liberal college where people wore Birkenstocks and fleece, listened to the *Grateful Dead*, and spent weekends sleeping outdoors. By choice. I think this is called *camping*? That's scarier than a French tourist with a butter knife. I've lived in the liberal Pacific Northwest for thirteen years and have never owned anything waterproof. If it's raining outside, I get wet. I have never liked the *Grateful Dead*. Never. I don't even like Cherry Garcia ice cream. I don't like being upside down. I'm terrified of moths. If I can't see the bottom of the body of water I'm swimming in I will become paralyzed with fear and drown. Worst of all, I'm terrified of being unprepared. Packing for a trip takes me *days*. Okay, *weeks*. I created a spreadsheet in Excel to better track all my essentials. That's right. Excel. I'm *that* uptight. What if I get all the way to Jupiter, FL and realize I forgot cotton balls? Yes, I know I can buy them there. I never said it was a rational fear.

My Australian travel party includes two friends. One is a mother of two toddlers (who should be adept in the art of preparation and packing) and the other is a librarian (who should be adept in the art of organization and research.) When I asked them what kind of suitcase they were bringing, they laughed. Guffawed really.

"A suitcase?" The Mommy asked. "You don't bring a suitcase on a trip to Australia. Maybe a duffle or a small roller bag."

Clearly The Mommy is sleep deprived. I ask The Librarian to please set her straight.

"I'm only bringing a backpack," she says, "to keep my hands free in case I need to wrestle you from the jaws of a crocodile."

My stomach sank and not because it looks like my dad's emails had reached her too. How did I allow myself to get roped into traveling across the world with two lunatics? Have they no reason? No realism? No toiletries?

It's times like these I find myself thinking WWTD. Tabitha is not just a skilled wizard, she's an accomplished adventurer, and to be an accomplished adventurer you must be ready to depart on your next escapade at a moment's notice. Tabby doesn't have the luxury of deciding between the kitten heels or the wedge. Judging from her ruddy complexion she obviously doesn't use an exfoliant. If only there were a handbook to help with these sorts of things.

Oh waitâ€¦.

Every so often I see someone in the halls clutching a black binder a thick as a hatbox to their chest. It's no secret that the contents are what will become the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook*. Fortunately, it's also no secret (thanks to New DM getting tired of us wandering into dank, dark dungeons only to realize no one brought a light source) that there's a nifty checklist of adventuring gear inside.

"Give me that thing!" I shout as I jump from behind a potted plant into Scott's path. He half-drops, half-shoves the 90-pound binder into my stomach. I'd like to think he gives in so readily because of my awesome intimidation, but really it's because he's also carrying his laptop, a latte and a cold piece of leftover pizza.

"Don't take it within five feet of my cubicle," he tells me. "It will self-destruct in your hands and probably ruin your shoes."

Heeding his advice, I drop into a sit position right there on the floor and find what I'm looking for. A whole chapter on equipment. Food, drink, lodging. Carrying, lifting, and (more likely) dragging. *Lonely Planet*'s got nothing on R&D. Better yet is the handy list of essential gear, neatly broken out by category. Really, my Excel spreadsheet isn't so different. I photocopy the list and bring it on Phase 1 of my great adventure. An exotic locale more terrifying than a shark-infested reef.

REI.

The fact that I've managed never to darken the mammoth door of this iconic Seattle establishment could very well have me extradited from the Northwest (and just imagine the packing nightmare *that* would be.) REI is as common an attraction as the Space Needle, Pike Place Market, and the Ducks (all of which I've done and survived, thank you). The Librarian agrees to chaperone me, as even Tabitha's bag of tricks can't conquer this beast alone.

Looking at the standard list of gear in The *Player's Handbook* proves helpful. Most of it has a department at REI. The backpack, bedroll, and trail rations. Belts, pouches, and lanterns. I might actually use some of this stuff. How about tucking a couple loaves of journeybread in your carry-on? You only need a few bites to fill you up, and it's good for you! Beats a $15 tub of Pringles.

Let the consumerism begin.

Backpack:

They want you to believe REI stands for Recreation Equipment International, but really it should stand for "Remove Every Incidental" because there's no way you're getting sunscreen and a razor in these eensie weensy valises.

"Excuse me?" I ask the teenage tree-hugger unloading stock. "Where do you keep the *Heward's handy haversacks*?"

"Heward's?" he ponders. "I don't know that we have that brand. But Eagle Creek makes a good day bag."

The librarian pinches me. "Don't be hostile. It's not his fault you have a co-dependent relationship with your eye lash curler."

Bitterness aside, I spy a backpack that measures twice the length of my torso and has more pockets that a pool hall. It's also got a streak of yellow, which stands out in this canvas world of beige and navy. Does ergonomic have to mean drab?

I've got to give the peeps at Eagle Creek credit. My first choice is a vortex of space and compartments ... certainly enough room for a couple weeks worth of novels and multiple shoe options. The teen tree hugger shakes his head even before pulling a measuring tape out of his sleeve. Who is this guy? Inspector Granola? He probably has a portable stove and some titanium dishware up there too.

"It's too big for carry-on," he tells me. "Try this." Tree Hugger tosses me a compact beige swatch of canvas and I'm not exaggerating when I say they make envelopes bigger than this. Just as I'm about to purchase a steamer trunk, a vision of Tabitha flashes before me.

"Oh please," she says. "Do you really need three pairs of jeans when you're seven inches from the equator?"

Fine. I take the tiny bag, but still, wouldn't something with wheels have been better ... like a station wagon?

Climber's Kit:

Personally I would prefer to hear the words "resort," "day spa," or "theme park" but almost every place we're hitting has the words "rock," "out," and "back" in it. Looks like we're going to need a climber's kit. Tabitha's version would have a grappling hook, hammer and ten pitons. She would also gain a +2 bonus on her Athletics checks while climbing.

I'm fairly certain a hammer and grappling hooks won't clear airport security, so I'll need an alternative. R&D, like everyone else in the Northwest, assumes we all have proper footwear because hiking shoes are nowhere on the adventuring list. I pick up a pair of shoes at the urging of The Librarian, who reminds me we'll be traveling during what's known as the monsoon season and my Chuck Taylor's might get "dirty."

"Now might be a good time to introduce you to Gore-Tex," she says.

Now might be a good time to purchase travel insurance.

Bedroll:

A bedroll sounds suspiciously like a sleeping bag according to The *Player's Handbook*, but the only bedroll I plan to see better involve a pat of butter and arrive in a basket on my nightstand with its friends Danish and Croissant. The Librarian interprets this differently. She stashes a pack of disposable travel pillowcases into my backpack (she *was* one of those youth hostel types).

"My college roommate discovered a colony of dust mites living in her nasal passage after spending the summer in Austria," she tells me.

I pick up a few extra packs of pillowcases as well as a toothbrush sanitizer, a facemask and a case of HygiMist.

Arcane Implement:

Probably the most important tool I can get my hands on is a *staff of defense*, and I'm not seeing them anywhere at REI. The Tree Hugger offers to see if he can order me one. I have to admit the junior hippie is growing on me. I almost wish I could fold him up like a Swiss Army Knife and bring him along if for no other reason than to see what else he's got up his polar fleece sleeve.

Any old wizard could use an ordinary implement to focus her spells, but an enchanted implement is handier than a collapsible java press. Should Tabitha be sporting one of these charming bad boys, she'd get an enhancement bonus on her attack and damage rolls with her arcane powers. Should I be sporting one of these ... well ... I'd probably be playing a wizard in a **D&D** campaign. It's too bad, because the staff can double as a weapon. Should one of those sneaky-ass crocodiles, clingy stingers or disemboweling koala bears (no, really?) get all up in my business, I'd gain a +1 to my Armor Class (which right now is -3 thanks to a wind resistant jacket and a

couple year's worth of kickboxing classes - and yes, -3 is an improvement).

I'd like to point out that an empty chest and fine clothing are also on the adventurer's checklist. I could also purchase a hippogriff to carry my load for a 1,000 gp, but I'm trying to turn over a new leaf here. Or eucalyptus, in this case. I'm not interested in traveling like a hermit crab with everything I own strapped to a knock-off Fendi backpack. Besides, the more stuff I leave at home, the more my parents can sell to pay off my travel debt.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble reports from Australia that she is managing just fine. The only danger she has encountered so far has involved not looking in the right direction when crossing the street and narrowing missing getting peed on by a kangaroo. Fortunately marsupials have found their way back into her heart due to a koala planting a kiss on her forehead.

DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Death and Dying

or "How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Negative Hit Points"

by Andy Collins
02/01/2008

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 362

*Welcome to Design & Development, your primary source of **D&D** 4th Edition insights and revelations! While you're here, keep in mind that the game is still in a state of flux, as refinements are made by our design and development staff. You're getting a look behind the curtain at game design in progress, so enjoy, and feel free to send your comments to dndinsider@wizards.com.*

Character death is one of the ultimate threats in any RPG, and **D&D** is no exception. Besides the obvious, um, "inconveniences" that death might cause your character and his allies in both the short and long term ... inconveniences which vary based on your level, the current situation, and of course your attachment to that particular character ... death is a mark of failure. In some hard-to-explain but very real way, a dead character symbolizes that you just "lost" at **D&D**. That can prove a bitter pill for many players, and in my experience is even more frustrating than paying for a *resurrection*.

What We Hated

Early in the design process, Rob, James, and I identified a number of ways that we were unsatisified with **D&D**'s current death and dying rules. For example, we strongly disliked the inability of 3rd Edition **D&D**'s negative-hit-point model to deal with combat at higher levels ... once the monsters are reliably dealing 15 or 20 points of damage with each attack, the chance of a character going straight from "alive and kicking" to "time to go through his pockets for loose change" was exceedingly high; effectively, the -1 to -9 "dying" range was meaningless. Ask any high-level fighter whether he'd prefer the second-to-last attack from a monster to leave him at 1 hp or -1 hp; I'd put odds on unconsciousness, and how lame is that?

Among other problems, this also meant that characters effectively had no way to "lose" a combat except by being killed. This removes a lot of dramatic possibilities for the story ... for instance, the classic scene of the characters being captured and thrown in a cell from which they have to escape using only their wits and a pack of chewing gum (or whatever).

On top of all that, the game added a complex state of being at exactly 0 hp, which wasn't quite like being fully capable but also wasn't quite dying. Honestly, though, how often does any character actually get reduced to exactly 0 hp? Why did the game need a condition that existed at exactly one spot on the big, broad range of hit point possibilities?

What We Wanted

We wanted a death and dying system that added fun and tension at the table, scaled well to any level of play, and created the threat of PC mortality (without delivering on that threat as often as 3rd Edition did).

Characters had to feel that death was a possibility in order for combat to feel meaningful. If it seems impossible to be killed, much of the tension of combat disappears. However, if the majority of combats result in death (as is the case for a lot of high-level play in previous editions), the game is forced to reclassify death as a trivial obstacle in order to remain playable. 3rd Edition accomplished this with popular spells such as *close wounds*, *delay death*, and *revivify* ... mandatory staples of any high-level cleric's arsenal due purely to the commonality of death. But that removes the tension, and now what's the point of death at all?

The system also had to be simple to remember and adjudicate at the table. Being able to keep the rule in your head is important, because you don't want to be bogging the game down flipping through a book when a character is clinging to life by a thread ... that should be high-tension time, not slowdown time!

Finally, it had to be believable within the heroic-fantasy milieu of **D&D**. (Believability isn't the same thing as realism ... an error which has ruined more games than I can count.) Put another way, it had to feel like **D&D** ... one of those tricky "you know it when you see it" things.

What We Did About It

Back in 2005, this was obviously a much lower priority than, say, creating the new model for how classes and races worked, so we put it on the back burner to simmer. As the months passed, we and other designers proposed various models that tried to solve the conundrums set out above, varying from exceedingly abstract to witheringly simulationist. We playtested every model, from death tracks to life points, each time learning something different about what worked or didn't work. A few times, we even temporarily settled on a solution, claiming that the playtesters only needed time to get used to our radical new ideas.

Thankfully, our awakening came well before we released the game (or even before widescale playtesting began, for that matter). Despite some quite elegant concepts, none of our radical new ideas met all the criteria necessary, including simplicity, playability, fun, and believability.

The system had to be at least as simple to remember and at least as easy to play as what already existed. For all their other flaws, negative hit points are pretty easy to use, and they work well with the existing hit-point system.

It had to be at least as much fun as what already existed, and it had to be at least as believable as what already existed. In ideal situations, negative hit points create fun tension at the table, and they're reasonably believable, at least within the heroic fantasy milieu of **D&D**, where characters are supposed to get the stuffing beaten out of them on a regular basis without serious consequences.

Every one of our new ideas failed to meet at least one of those criteria. Maybe they were playable but too abstract to feel fun or believable, or they were believable but too complicated to remember. Nothing worked, and I admit we experienced a couple of freak-out moments behind closed doors.

Side note to all those would-be game designers out there: When you hear yourself making that claim, you might be in danger of losing touch with reality. Sometimes you're right, and your innovative game design concept just needs a little time to sink in. (The cycling initiative system used by 3rd Edition **D&D** is a good example of that ... back in 1999, some very vociferous playtesters were convinced that it would ruin **D&D** combat forever. Turned out that wasn't exactly true.) But every time you convince yourself that you know better than the people playing your game, you're opening the possibility of a very rude (and costly) awakening.

The Breakthrough

Eventually we got it through our heads that there wasn't a radical new game mechanic just waiting to be discovered that would revolutionize the narrow window between life and death in **D&D**. What we really needed to do was just widen the window, reframe it, and maybe put in an extra pane for insulation. (OK, that analogy went off the tracks, but its heart was in the right place.)

Characters still use a negative hit point threshold to determine when they move from "unconscious and dying" to "all-the-way-dead," but now that threshold scales with their level (or more specifically, with their hit point total). A character with 30 hit points (such as a low-level cleric) dies when he reaches -15 hit points, while the 15th-level fighter with 120 hp isn't killed until he's reduced to -60 hit points.

That may seem like an unreachable number, but it's important to remember that monsters, like characters, aren't piling on as many attacks on their turn as in 3rd Edition. At 15th level, that fighter might face a tough brute capable of dishing out 25 or 30 points of damage with its best attack ... or nearly twice that on a crit. The threat of "alive-to-negative-everything" on a single hit remains in play, but it's much less common than in the previous edition. That puts that bit of tension back where it belongs.

The new system also retains the "unconscious character bleeding out" concept, but for obvious reasons speeds it along a bit. (There's not really any tension watching that 15th-level fighter bleed out at a rate of 1 hp per round for 30 or 40 rounds.) Thanks to some clever abstractions, the new system also removes the predictability of the current death timer. ("OK, Regdar's at -2 hp, so we have 8 rounds to get to him. Yawn ... time for a nap.")

It's also less costly to bring dying characters back into the fight now ... there's no "negative hit point tax" that you have to pay out of the healing delivered by your cure serious wounds prayer. That helps ensure that a character who was healed from unconsciousness isn't in an immediate threat of going right back there (and you'll never again have the "I fed Jozan a *potion of healing* but he's still at negative hit points" disappointment).

Monsters don't need or use this system unless the DM has special reason to do so. A monster at 0 hp is dead, and you don't have to worry about wandering around the battlefield stabbing all your unconscious foes. (I'm sure my table isn't the only place that happens.) We've talked elsewhere about some of the bogus parallelism that can lead to bad game design ... such as all monsters having to follow character creation rules, even though they're supposed to be foes to kill, not player characters ... this is just another example of the game escaping that trap. Sure, a DM can decide for dramatic reasons that a notable NPC or monster might linger on after being defeated. Maybe a dying enemy survives to deliver a final warning or curse before expiring, or at the end of a fight the PCs discover a bloody trail leading away from where the evil warlock fell, but those will be significant, story-based exceptions to the norm.

Oh, and speaking of zero hit points? You're unconscious and dying, just like every new player expects it should be. It's not as harsh as the "dead at 0 hp" rule of the original **D&D** game, but it's still not a place you want to be for long!

Try It Now!

If you want to try out a version of this system in your current game, try the following house rule. It's not quite the 4th Edition system, but it should give you an idea of how it'll feel.

1) At 0 hp or less, you fall unconscious and are dying.
Any damage dealt to a dying character is applied normally, and might kill him if it reduces his hit points far enough (see #2).

2) Characters die when their negative hit point total reaches -10 or one-quarter of their full normal hit points, whichever is a larger value.
This is less than a 4th Edition character would have, but each monster attack is dealing a smaller fraction of the character's total hit points, so it should be reasonable. If it feels too small, increase it to one-third full normal hit points and try again.

3) If you're dying at the end of your turn, roll 1d20.
Lower than 10: You get worse. If you get this result three times before you are healed or stabilized (as per the Heal skill), you die.
10-19: No change.
20: You get better! You wake up with hit points equal to one-quarter your full normal hit points.

4) If a character with negative hit points receives healing, he returns to 0 hp before any healing is applied.
In other words, he'll wake up again with hit points equal to the healing provided by the effect ... a *cure light wounds* spell for 7 hp will bring any dying character back to 7 hp, no matter what his negative hit point total had reached.)

5) A dying character who's been stabilized (via the Heal skill) doesn't roll a d20 at the end of his turn unless he takes more damage.

About the Author

Andy Collins works as the system design and development manager for D&D at Wizards of the Coast. His development credits include the *Player's Handbook* v.3.5, *Races of Eberron*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide II*. He is also one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D, along with Rob Heinsoo and James Wyatt.

Halflings

by Chris Sims
02/08/2008

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 362

The Design & Development *article series premiered on the **D&D** website back in September 2005, and has been a staple ever since. With the approach of 4th Edition, and our designers and developers focused on the new edition, this column will be the primary vehicle for 4th Edition coverage. We'll not only give you peeks at what's forthcoming, but also the "how" and "why."*

*Keep in mind that the game is still in a state of flux, as refinements are made by our design and development staff. You're getting a look behind the curtain at game design in progress, so enjoy, and feel free to send your comments to dndinsider@wizards.com.*Rivers and streams crisscross the world, and upon these waterways, the nomadic halflings quietly do the same. Legend says that Melora and Sehanine together crafted the halflings, instilling in these small folk a love of water and nature, as well as an innate wanderlust and stealth. The same stories say that both goddesses then left the halflings to their own devices.

Left to themselves, halflings lived for ages. They formed close families and communities, centered on their wisest elders. Clans of halflings wandered creation, never stopping for long, and rarely claiming any particular spot as their own. Their traditions formed and

survived among a population constantly on the move and influenced little by the ways of other races. Unassuming, resourceful and independent, halflings hardly ever attracted much notice.

But Avandra, the goddess of boldness, luck and travel, took note of the halflings traversing the world. It seemed to her as if these little people, whom she didn't create, were hers nonetheless by virtue of the fact that they were living manifestations of her best-loved ideals. Halflings say Avandra smiled on them that day, adopting them as her people and blessing them with good fortune through their worldly struggles. Anyone who knows halflings has little doubt that chance is indeed on their side.

Halflings, for their part, hold fables such as these as true, and their rich oral tradition of such tales is an important part of their culture. Young halflings learn the lore of their people, clan and family from hearing stories. From these, halfling children also pick up lessons on morality and knowledge of many subjects. Outside the political struggles, wars, and other concerns of nations and empires, but widely traveled, halflings have observed and preserved what they learned in their common yarns.

Favorite sagas retell the life and deeds of halflings bold enough to strike out on their own to see the world, right a wrong, or accomplish a great task. Most halflings are practical folk, concerning themselves with the simple things in life. Adventurous halflings are of the same stripe but practice such habits in a different way. A halfling leaves the security of family and clan not for high ideals, fame, or wealth. Instead, he goes to protect his community or friends, to prove his own capabilities, or to merely see more of the world than his nomadic lifestyle can offer.

A halfling hero might be the size of a preteen human child, but he has quick feet, deft hands and quick wit. He is forthright, bold and nigh fearless. His talents run toward sneakiness and craftiness. Pluck and fortune carry him to success where others would fail. He is an expression of all that halflings esteem, and so he is a valuable ally and a daunting foe.

All this went into creating halflings for the 4th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** game. The popular halfling of 3rd Edition is only slightly re-imagined so the race's mechanical elements make the story elements true. Halflings are still Small, even though they are not 3rd Edition's versions ... in which halflings are the size of 3- or 4-year old humans. They still make great rogues, but they also make good rangers. A few new aspects, such as a tweak to Charisma and a slight influence over luck, in addition to making halfling warlocks viable, reinforce the halfling as a lucky, loveable protagonist. A halfling can also be a hard-to-kill enemy sharp of tongue and blade.

In other words, halflings are exactly what veteran **D&D** players expect from the 4th Edition refinement to something that worked well in 3rd Edition. Similar flavor, mechanical underpinning to the story, and as much, if not more, fun.

About the Author

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V, Secrets of Sarlona, Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).

DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Magic Item Slots

by Logan Bonner
Art by Brian Hagan and Beth Trott
01/23/2008

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 362

*Welcome to Design & Development, your primary source of **D&D** 4th Edition insights and revelations! While you're here, keep in mind that the game is still in a state of flux, as refinements are made by our design and development staff. You're getting a look behind the curtain at game design in progress, so enjoy, and feel free to send your comments to dndinsider@wizards.com.*

One of our goals in 4th Edition was to reduce characters' reliance on magic items. The most important portion of this goal involved removing a lot of the magic items that were essential just so your character could feel effective, like stat-boosting items, amulets of natural armor, and the like. We also felt like these items weren't as exciting as magic items should be, yet characters depended on them heavily to feel adequate in proportion to their level. We felt that the cool stuff a character can do should come from that character's abilities, not his gear.

Items are divided by item slot, much like they were in **D&D** 3.5 (though it took until *Magic Item Compendium* for the system to be quantified clearly). As before, you can only wear one item in each slot. The number of slots has been reduced (by combining slots that were similar), to keep the number of items manageable and easy to remem-ber. You still have a ton of choices for items in the game, and when we were still using more slots, our playtesters reported that it caused information overload.

Primary Slots

We've preserved a number of items that have traditional "plusses." These are the items we expect everybody to care about, and the ones that are factored into the math behind the game. If you're 9th level, we expect you to have a set of +2 armor, and the challenges in the game at that level are balanced accordingly. Here are the primary item slots:

Weapon/Implement: Whether you're swinging a mace or blasting with a magic wand, you have an item that adds to your attack and damage. These weapons also set your critical hit dice (the extra dice you roll when you score a critical hit, see the Design & Development article, "Critical Hits"). Even though this is called an item slot, that doesn't mean you can't wield more than one weapon, because that would make the ranger cry. *3.5 Equivalents:* Weapons, holy symbols, rods, staffs, wands.

Armor: This category now includes cloth armor, so the wizard in robes has magic armor just like the rest of the group. Magic armor adds an enhancement bonus to your Armor Class. *3.5 Equivalents:* Body, torso.

Neck: An item in the neck slot increases your Fortitude, Reflex, and Will defenses, as well as usually doing something else snappy. The most common items are amulets and cloaks. *3.5 Equivalents:* Shoulders, throat.

Secondary Slots

These items don't have enhancement bonuses. That makes them essentially optional. You could adventure with no items in your secondary item slots and not see a huge decrease in your overall power. Take what looks cool, but don't worry about having empty slots.

Arms: These are bulky items that fit over your arms, such as bracers, vambraces, and shields. You'll notice that shields no longer have an enhancement bonus. Instead, shields have special defensive effects and items you wear instead of shields, like bracers, are more offensive. *3.5 Equivalents:* Arms, shields.

Feet: Focused on mobility and special movement modes, you can be pretty sure what you're getting when you look at magic boots, greaves, or sandals. *3.5 Equivalent:* Feet.

Hands: Thinner items that fit on your hands fall into this category. This includes gauntlets and gloves. They usu-ally help out your attacks or help your manual dexterity. *3.5 Equivalent:* Hands.

Head: These items increase your mental skills or enhance your senses. Helmets, circlets, and goggles all fall in this category. Another major subcategory here includes orbitals, such as ioun stones. If you see someone with an orbital, it's a good bet you're dealing with an epic character. *3.5 Equivalents:* Face, head.

Rings: This slot has changed quite a bit. A starting character isn't powerful enough to unleash the power of a ring. You can use one ring when you reach paragon tier (11th level) and two when you're epic (21st level). And before you get started about how Frodo sure as hell wasn't epic, let's be clear: the One Ring was an artifact, not a magic item any old spellcaster could make. Artifacts follow their own rules. *3.5 Equivalent:* Rings.

Waist: Items you wear around your waist are usually about protection, healing, or increasing your Strength tem-porarily. *3.5 Equivalent:* Waist.

Other Items

Some items don't use item slots. Some of them aren't useful in combat. Others can be useful in a fight, but only once in a while.

Potions: Potions are consumable items, and they're mostly focused on healing effects.

Wondrous Items: This category no longer includes wearable items. These are utility items that don't take up space on your body or act as weapons.

Example

Here's what my 11th-level gnome warlock, Dessin, is wearing right now:

Implement: *+3 rod of dark reward*
Armor: *+3 leather armor*

Neck: *+2 cloak of survival*
Arms: *Bracers of the perfect shot*
Feet: *Wavestrider boots*
Hands: *Shadowfell gloves*
Head: *Diadem of acuity*
Rings: None right now, sadly
Waist: *Belt of battle*
Wondrous Items: *Bag of holding*

About the Author

Logan Bonner joined Wizards of the Coast as in 2006 as an editor on **Dungeons & Dragons**. He had no experience in the industry prior to joining WotC, and marvels that his clever ruse has lasted this long. After doing some class design work for 4th Edition on the side, he joined the mechanical design team. His previous editing products include *Magic Item Compendium* and *Monster Manual V*, and he wrote about half of *Eberron Survival Guide*, which releases in March '08.

Fearless

by Chris Thomasson
02/20/2007

Dragon Editorial Archive
Dragon 362

I've always been something of a risk taker with my **D&D** characters. I played 1st Edition for only a year when I was very young, so I didn't live in perpetual fear of walls, floors, and ceilings that were actually uber-deadly monsters. Throughout 3rd Edition, I'd volunteer to be the guy who opened the door or the chest, even though I was nearly certain to pay the consequences. Sometimes, said consequences took unexpected turns. I think Chris Perkins took a certain perverse glee, in fact, in making me pay for being (I'll cowboy up and say it) *foolishly* brazen. For example, the first time we found a suit of magic full plate in the last campaign, I was the only character proficient, so I confidently threw it on ... and promptly turned into a woman. Turns out the armor's previous owner was a dwarf princess who grew up in a misogynistic monarchy. The only way she could gain the throne was as a man, so ... yeah.

But that's beside the point. Part of the reason Chris came up with so many unique ways to, ahem, challenge his players is that he ran a game full of designers and developers. When given unbridled access to the saucy number of character options out there in 3rd Edition, our characters tended to flex the power curve. Don't get me wrong: I like 3E as much as the next guy, but the unifying math behind the game tended to, well, allow for a range of options, to put it delicately. If you've ever selected the Travel domain with your cleric, or chosen *ray of enfeeblement* as a 1st-level spell instead of *erase* (Really? *Erase*? What were we thinking?!), then you know what I'm talking about here.

All that said, there were still places I would draw the line. At low levels, especially, a character's sheer lack of hit points were a liability. Every failed trap save or triggered hazard resulted in a larger percentage of your resources disappearing. At higher levels, the game evolved into the "Don't Roll a 1" game. You could have +42 on your Fort save, but if you roll a 1 against the damn beholder's flesh to stone ray, you're gonna fail (and yes, I'm speaking from first-hand experience).

Well, over the past few months, I've learned to shake off the ghosts of previous editions. I'm still brazen to the point of foolishness, but now I don't have to metagame and shirk away from certain tasks that I knew carried far more risk in previous editions. In the past, I played with the assurance that I could survive what came my way because my character was a bad-ass. Playing 4th Edition, I'm still confident, but for a different reason, and with a different outcome. If in 3rd Edition confidence in my character's chops drove me on, in 4th Edition, it's still confidence, but in the system.

Quite simply, the math behind the game is so rock solid that I've been encouraged to play my character as a genuine, action movie, one-liner quoting hero. I'm not rushing to open the door because I know I can survive the *fireball* trap on the door. It's that I know that the trap on the door isn't some ruthless save or die effect that will punish me for rolling a 1 on my save. I still don't shy away from danger, but I find myself taking *even more* risks with my 4th Edition character than I did before. I don't dread the *finger of death*, *wail of the banshee*, or worst of all, *energy drain* effects that so permeated previous editions.

I'll be the first to open the obviously magic scroll tube, even though my Arcana check of 8 wasn't enough to find a cantrip on a catbox, let alone a scroll tube clutched by the corpse of a high priest of a long-extinct yuan-ti cult. That's right, the *high* priest. But I opened that scroll tube, knowing that the game wouldn't just kill me outright for my temerity. (Sure, I ended up with an alien intelligence in residence in my brian, but it's not trying to control me or anything. It just seems content to chill out and tell me where the cool stuff in the dungeon is.)

Here's an another example of our hijinks, something I would never have attempted at this level in 3E.

Let me start by saying this: Racing through a mine in a mine cart *Temple of Doom*-style should be mandatory for all **D&D** adventurers, at least once in their careers. Complete with jumps, hairpin corners taken on two wheels, monster attacks and collapsing tracks, it was possibly the most fun sequence of encounters I've ever had in a **D&D** game. In previous editions, I never would have considered taking this risk. I would have been afraid that my fragile character, especially at 4th level, would never have survived the jump or 40-foot drop off the top of the raised tracks. Instead, "the only thing missing," my character Deimos gleefully shouted to Mat Smith's character Garrot, "is fire! We need some explosions!"

Just to be perfectly clear, here: the player proposing this incredible venture in the first place (yours truly) is playing a character with Wisdom 8, to another player (Mr. Smith) playing a character with Intelligence 8. If that's not a match made for the Darwin awards, I don't know what is.

We also learned a lot about cart/monster physics in that adventure. For example, did you know that darkmantles have trouble grabbing your face when you whip by at 30 mph? In fact, if they make impact with a resilient surface ... say a shield held out as a windbreak ... they splatter like bugs?

But perhaps the best moment was when the other character on our little side adventure, the dragonborn warlord Abraxus played by Andrew Finch, saw the gap in the tracks ahead. Thinking in 3rd Edition terms, I'm sure, he decided the wise choice was to tumble out the back of the cart, taking just a few points of damage rather than risk "certain" death by mine cart. But after Garrot and Deimos made their jump ... pulling an untrained Dungeoneering check out of their, well, you know ... Abraxus could only marvel that as strange as it seemed, he made the wrong choice by falling out.

And that's what **D&D** has become to me now. My character gets to act like a hero each week. The threat of doom still hangs over our heads ... heck, shortly after the mine cart derby, our character fought and killed (barely, and I mean barely) a level 11 solo monster ... and we still know that we could die, as Garrot (one death so far) and Amnon (Greg Bilsland's first character) can attest. But I'm more comfortable taking risks than I ever was before, secure in the knowledge that one stupid mistake ... or worse, one d20 roll ... is less likely to kill me.

Two stupid mistakes, though ... well, we'll just have to wait and see what Garrot and Deimos get up to next week.

Part 1: A City Comes Alive

by Chris Tulach
09/29/2007

RPGA Report Archive
Dragon 362

By now, many of you've heard the announcement regarding the new **Living Forgotten Realms** campaign, starting next year at Gen Con Indy. It will be an evolution of a system that's been around for 20 years. But how did we get to where we are today?

Back in the 1980s, the RPGA was all about tournament play. You would show up at a big convention like Gen Con, get a pregenerated character, and attempt to advance through the multi-round event to win the big prize. Several now-classic 1st Edition adventures began as tournament adventures played through the RPGA, and the legacy of the tournament adventure remains alive today in the D&D Open Championship. However, the times, they were a-changin'!

At Gen Con in 1987, the RPGA first presented a bring-your-own character adventure, *On the Road to the Living City*. The "Living City" was Raven's Bluff, a city in the fan-favorite world of Ed Greenwood's creation that had just been given its very own boxed set: the **Forgotten Realms**. For the first time, you could bring your own character to the table, play the adventure, receive goodies at the end, and keep your character for the next time. The campaign was called **Living City**.

Living City was a breakthrough for the RPGA ... it was the first time you could take your character from one game set in the world and bring it to another. Now, in those early days, games were few and far between; in fact, it was a whole year before the second adventure came out! Slowly, the **Living City** games expanded beyond just Gen Con; before long, they were also showing up at Winter Fantasy, followed by other big shows.

In the early days, characters could advance only up to 5th level, which took years since adventures were sparse. A lot of players played human characters, since they could take advantage of the old dual-classing rules to keep playing after they'd hit 5th level. You were simply trusted to write down the gold and magic items you received on your character sheet; since there were so few adventures, it was

easy to call shenanigans if a player wrote down some piece of magic gear that hadn't been earned honestly. In fact, many of the judges knew exactly what items had been given out and in which adventures, without even referencing them!

Those days eventually gave way to a more organized system. Second Edition had come around, and the **Forgotten Realms** received an update through *The Avatar Trilogy* and the ***Forgotten Realms*** *Adventures* hardcover rulebook. By the early 1990s, **Living City** had grown to parity with tournament games (otherwise known as "Classic" adventures). More and more players were joining in to be a part of the Raven's Bluff community, and as a result, more and more adventures were being written. The campaign moved its level ceiling first to 7th level. As time went on, it would creep higher and higher. As the number of adventures increased, it became increasingly harder to keep track of what magic items had been given out in which adventures, so a certificate system was developed.

At the end of each session of play, any magic items found in that adventure would have corresponding certificates laid out on the table. The group would then decide which character received each item. Sometimes, especially with regular play groups, this was easy: the fighter got the magic sword and the cleric got the staff that only he could use. Other times, it was more difficult to decide, as two or more players wanted the same magic item for their character. Usually, players would roll off to determine who received what, or "buy off" other interested characters with other magic items or gold. Certificates were a big deal back then; having those little slips of paper represented accomplishments in the game, a measure of your character's success as an adventurer, and were a commodity traded almost as furiously as stocks on Wall Street.

Living City was becoming a large part of the RPGA; by the end of 1993, it had surpassed tournament adventures in total play. The success of **Living City** would result in several "spinoffs" that used variations on the first Living campaign's model to provide alternative settings for bring-your-own-character adventures. By now, it was definite that shared-world campaigns would become the future of the RPGA. But that's a story for another column. Next month, we'll talk about **Living City**'s halcyon days, as well as its conclusion.

Part 2: Success and Decline in the Living City

by Chris Tulach
02/06/2008

RPGA Report Archive
Dragon 362

Last time, in part 1 of this series, I talked about the beginnings of the first Living campaign, called **Living City**. From its humble beginnings back in the late '80s as an alternative play experience to the tournament-style convention play the **RPGA** was offering, it grew to become the most popular program the **RPGA** had yet seen.

By 1995, **Living City** was what most **RPGA** members were playing. The campaign had dozens of adventures released yearly, and multiple story arcs affected the city of Raven's Bluff in the *Forgotten Realms*. There was even a long-running war plot arc that lasted the better part of two years. Many players had multiple characters; it was simply impossible to play the same character in every adventure.

While certificates were certainly one of the first organizational breakthroughs for the campaign, it was at this time that a "tier" system was becoming more and more necessary. An avid **Living City** player might have a 12th-level character, and while the **RPGA** wanted to keep those players playing their favorite characters, there was also still a strong need to introduce new players to the campaign. Many adventures started to incorporate tiers -- the adventure's plot and backstory would be the same no matter what level characters participated, but the challenges would be tailored to something appropriate for the group's average level. This helped to solve problems with delivering new content to a widening membership, but created some others in its wake.

2nd Edition wasn't exactly the most flexible system for this tiered model. Power levels for monsters weren't as clearly defined as they would become later on, and it often led to uneven play experiences. Most adventures had a "sweet spot" -- usually, the level of play the author had envisioned for the adventure. Playing in the sweet spot (or close to it) made for an ideal play experience; more often than not, playing too far outside the sweet spot led to either story inconsistencies or unbalanced combat encounters. Players and DMs made the best of it though, and play continued to grow throughout the 1990's.

It was also around this time that a separate play arena was established for high-level characters (those that had attained at least 10th level). It was becoming increasingly difficult to adjudicate the actions of higher level groups in a "normal" adventure. A common high-level group would have access to hundreds of magic items and very powerful spells. Many DMs had difficulty providing appropriate challenges for them in the regular adventures. A special series of high-level adventures were written specifically to deal with the avid **Living City** players that had characters requiring a greater challenge. Eventually, two high-level areas were established for play: the Underdark and the planes. Segregating the highest-level characters into their own mini-campaign helped to maintain tighter writing on adventures for both groups.

In 1997, TSR went out of business, and the future of **Dungeons & Dragons** was in question. Winter Fantasy, a long-standing **RPGA** convention, was cancelled that year. Folks working in the **RPGA** continued to provide content through this uncertain period. For a few months, it was the only new **D&D** content that was being distributed anywhere. Eventually, Wizards of the Coast stepped in and kept the **D&D** legacy alive. Even though times were tough, the **RPGA** and **Living City** continued to grow.

In 1999, Wizards announced at Gen Con Indy that there would be a new version of the **D&D** game coming out the next year -- 3rd Edition. At around the same time, work began on a new Living campaign designed to expand upon the scope of what had already existed. This campaign was called **Living Greyhawk**. (We'll discuss **Living Greyhawk** in more detail in a later article.)

With 3rd Edition looming, **Living City** players were given a choice. Certainly, the onset of a new edition of the game brought obsolescence to the play of 2nd Edition in the **RPGA**. So, a crossroads was reached, and a vote was taken at Gen Con Indy. The options were to (1) convert all existing characters and some content to 3rd Edition, (2) keep the campaign but completely restart, or (3) conclude the campaign in its entirety. In the end, conversion won out. It would prove to be incredibly daunting and helped to speed the campaign's decline.

The biggest, most difficult issue was conversion of certificates. Players had been collecting them for the better part of a decade, and they represented all the magic items each character had accumulated throughout their adventuring career. **D&D** was a very item-based game; many characters were defined by the magic items they possessed. Every item that had ever been issued in the game had to be converted to 3rd Edition rules (or ruled as non-convertible). In addition, since the items were issued on paper, all the members had to mail their certificates in to Wizards. They had to be processed and new certificates had to be reissued. Everything had to be tracked. It was a logistical behemoth.

The strain on the **RPGA** staff at the time was massive. In addition, there were printing errors in the first batch of certificates that went back to the players, so another printing was needed. Character conversion went smoother, but there were still a number of rules issues that simply couldn't be addressed by the 3rd Edition conversion document. Adventures were also treading new 3rd Edition ground, and many preconceptions of writing adventures for **D&D** needed to be reassessed.

The workload became too great for the **RPGA** staff to maintain, particularly since **Living Greyhawk** had entered the system, was larger in scope, and required more attention. **Living City** was handed off to a company called Organized Play for management. Attempts were made to revitalize play. A new campaign, the **Ruins of Raven's Bluff**, was an attempt at a restart, but it was too late. **Living City** concluded in 2003, with only a few hundred players participating in its final adventure. By that time, most of the player base had either moved to **Living Greyhawk** or other 3rd Edition shared-world campaigns.

Next month, we'll talk about Living campaign fever spreading throughout the **RPGA** in the 1990's, and give brief summaries of past "spin-off" programs that existed over the last thirteen years.

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, Chris Tulach actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has recently become the RPGA Content Manager, responsible for the development and deployment of **Dungeons & Dragons** organized play programs.